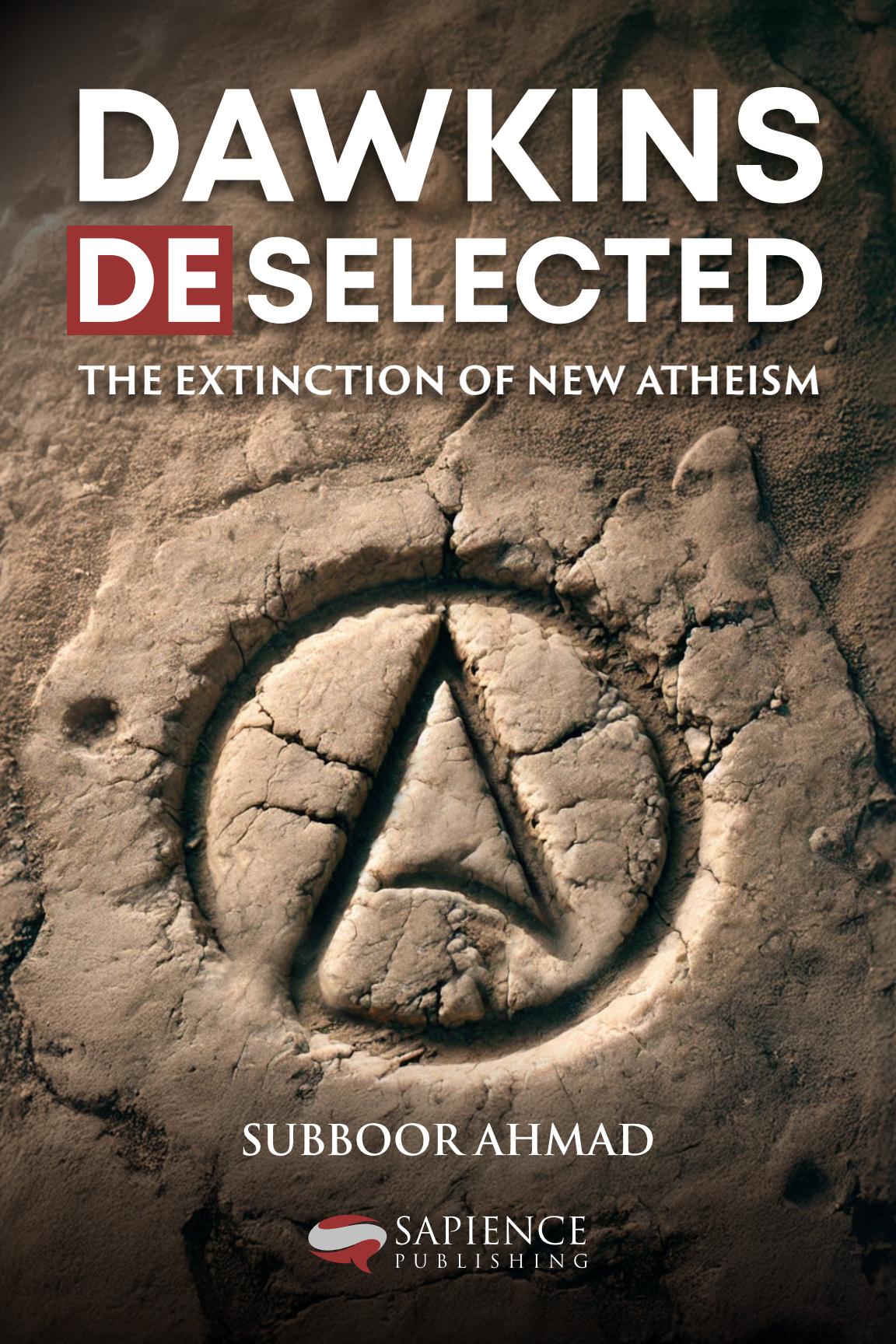


# DAWKINS DESELECTED

THE EXTINCTION OF NEW ATHEISM



SUBBOOR AHMAD



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**DAWKINS DESELECTED:  
THE EXTINCTION OF NEW ATHEISM**



# Dawkins Deselected: The Extinction of New Atheism

SUBBOOR AHMAD

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*What is the matter with you that you are not in awe of  
the Majesty of God, when He truly created you in stages  
of development?*

— Quran 71:13-14



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## Foreword

There is an unkind stereotype about experts balking at those implementing tools and insights from their field without appreciating their full glory; physicists look down on engineers, biologists scoff at healthcare professionals, and so on. Like all stereotypes, there is a kernel of truth in it, and the sentiment sometimes exists. “They’re doing the work, but they don’t really appreciate its theoretical foundations.” A similar sentiment has been felt by many scientists regarding the New Atheist movement, which many of us believe has hijacked the surface-level discourse of fields we spent our careers in, while refusing to consider the intellectual and philosophical foundations of the very observations, conclusions, or theories they championed to support their worldview. I recall when Dawkins, one of the heads of this new clergy, was asked by a disciple whether they should learn the philosophy of science; he replied, “just do the science.” Like hamsters running in wheels, they are doing the work, unaware of its foundations.

When I was at university, this movement was in full swing, and it had many converts. I recall many discussions and debates with students and later colleagues who enjoyed a comforting certainty in their atheism, using speculative observations and specious arguments that were immune to any serious intellectual scrutiny. The so-called “New Atheist” writers were the cause of this. Speaking and writing online and in books printed by popular mainstream publishers (not academic journals with little to no peer review), they masterfully blurred the lines between persuasion, fiction, and science, knowingly or unknowingly misrepresenting what was happening in the world of biology and using a newfound zeal for neo-Darwinism to sell atheism.

Neo-Darwinism, whose central dogmas are outlined in our last book, cannot be used by any serious thinker to justify atheism because evolutionary biology doesn’t have a foot in the door when it comes to questions about the origins of the universe or our planet. If anything, endowing DNA with the levels of supernatural powers that neo-Darwinism requires is a

harder product for a philosophical naturalist to sell compared to competing theories such as the Third Way, which has shaken the world of biology and successfully dismantled all four of the central dogmas of neo-Darwinism, as explained in the previous book. It is telling that the only thing standing in the way of the wholesale rejection of neo-Darwinism in public discourse is the inertia of dogma among its adherents.

Dawkins famously said that Darwin allowed him to be an “intellectually satisfied atheist,” which gives us insight into this movement. One’s satisfaction is not a barometer of reality but a function of one’s internal state, as the truth is under no obligation to satisfy or make sense to us. Our environments, cultures, thoughts, emotions, feelings, and personalities all influence what we regard as normal or abnormal, sensible or silly, believable or unbelievable. This is why almost any wisdom tradition on earth has at its core a distrust of the individual’s thoughts, feelings, and desires, which the Islamic tradition mitigated by creating a methodology for verifying claims empirically that we enjoy to this day.

During my studies and research, I was fortunate enough to be exposed to and mentored by responsible scientists who kept their theological beliefs (theistic or atheistic) from getting in the way of their work and thinking about science. They understood science for what it is—not a tool for dogmatically uncovering Truth but a dynamic story that is always changing and always open to rewriting based on newer evidence. Some popular communicators of science in the last few decades have thus done a disservice to this exciting enterprise, and as a result, we have lost a generation who have merely adopted some claims as dogma; crystallized, frozen in time, uninterested in anything that goes against them. This is not to say that those who study biology should not have an opinion or belief about theology, or vice versa; rather, we mourn the loss of the polymath who can understand multiple fields based on cogent intellectual foundations, rather than a surface-level understanding.

Thankfully, there are signs that this is changing. While the most zealous adherents have indeed been at the forefront of attacking, canceling, protesting, and trying to silence and defund scientific research in areas that “blaspheme” against their sanctities, as described in our last book, “heretics” in the scientific community are becoming louder and bolder. Too much energy and resources are required to hold back strong arguments, and the captivating personalities central to the “intellectually satisfied atheist” phenomenon are aging and dwindling in their flamboyance (even to the degree of warming up to Western Christianity). There is also increasing multidisciplinarity emerging, which acts as a bulwark against reductionist, dogmatic behavior, bucking the trend of the last century and harkening back

to an age of mastery in multiple fields for the sake of deeper understanding and wisdom, rather than merely making the hamster's wheel spin faster.

For its part, this book contributes by surgically addressing the claims and arguments of the New Atheist movement based on the intellectual and philosophical foundations of science. It is a must-read for those affected by New Atheists or those simply wanting a concise summary of the solid philosophical arguments critiquing this trend. Whatever one's beliefs are, they should be able to appreciate the mastery of presentation of arguments and the expertise of the author and the shoulders he is standing on. This book marks a return to thinking beyond soundbites and slogans—separating noise from knowledge. It invites us to step off the hamster wheel of false certainty and walk instead on the firm ground of reasoned thought.

Salman Butt  
PhD, Imperial College London  
Editor, Islam21c

LONDON, UK  
May 2025



## CHAPTER 1

# On the Origins of the New Atheist Movement

As I write this book, the patriarch of the New Atheism movement, Richard Dawkins, is still alive, even though the movement he founded and led has died and its embers are petering out. This phenomenon of a faith group dwindling during the lifetime of its chief proponent is actually surprisingly common for cults and new-age religions. We saw it with The Peoples Temple, the Osho movement, and the Fundamentalist Church of Latter-Day 'Saints'. All began as 'progressive' rejections of status quo and then they all imploded after people realised they contained little of value or merit. All four of the above are examples of cults that lowered in intensity during the lifetime of their patriarchs—and, yes, they were all invariably patriarchal, despite any and all of their pretences to the contrary.

The story is a time-old one and many societies throughout the ages have been plagued with such cults. At times, these older societies fought to suppress the new movements with violence, and at other times, the movements died on their own terms. Pythagoreanism ran rife in ancient Italy before it was crushed with violence by a pro-democracy counter-movement. Sabbatai Zevi's messianic movement in the 1700s gathered a colossal following before his conversion to Islam led to the movement's rapid collapse. And in ancient India, the Cārvāka school was explicitly materialist and atheistic, rejecting all Eastern spirituality before being intellectually overcome by highly spiritual worldviews.

Consider this book to be the autopsy of New Atheism and a reflection on its failed aims. The movement was led by four charismatic individuals, all quite similar in their cultural backgrounds and understandings, and all adopting a post-Christian worldview. This movement transcended mere

atheism—which is a simple rejection of the belief in God—as it represents a bolder, more aggressive bloc that is overtly materialistic, humanistic, anti-theistic, and mostly liberal. Under a thin veneer lies its imperialist, proselytising, and white supremacist roots, though these latter character traits often need some unearthing before they are fully identifiable.

Like any new movement, New Atheism needed a story and some lore to help propagate itself throughout the world. Unfortunately for its followers, the movement failed to achieve this. New Atheism had initially risen to prominence following the 9/11 attacks in America. It rode the rising wave of anti-Islamic rhetoric and bandwagoned on this hatred to propagate itself. Once tempers settled, and people began to more soberly see the world, the impetus for New Atheism dissipated. Hatred and intolerance are not particularly productive emotions, and the New Atheists lacked the creative and beautifying impulse that spirituality brings. This meant that they had brought nothing of value for the world—no beauty or joy. The more atheistic a worldview becomes, the more it moves towards sameness, greyness, and tedium. Albert Camus remarks that, “If we believe in nothing, if nothing has any meaning and if we can affirm no values whatsoever, then everything is possible and nothing has any importance.”<sup>1</sup>

The founding fathers of New Atheism are often referred to as the ‘four horsemen’. This is an intentionally offensive title. Causing offence and fighting for the freedom to do so is a declared aim of theirs.<sup>2</sup> By name, these four individuals are: Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett. Of these, the first is undoubtedly the principal patriarch.

These four men have made it their lifelong goal to attack and dismantle religion in any way they can. However, they are all amateur thinkers with a very poor understanding of the religions they wish to attack. Yet attack they do. And whenever they come up short in logic, philosophy, and theology, they jump to arguments from culture, morality, and politics.

One’s opinion of the four horsemen often depends on one’s worldview. To the faithful New Atheist masses, these four horsemen are deified. To onlookers, they are belligerent hate preachers, inquisitorial and unthinking. Rarely do we see ever useful and productive dialogue from them.

Their discussions with theists are invariably combative. They love to insult and accuse, but then they become evidently shy when it comes to actually debating serious theists. William Lane-Craig, perhaps the foremost Christian apologist in the Western academic milieu, wished to debate them all. He debated Hitchens and Harris, annihilating both of them and effectively ending the latter’s debating career.<sup>3,4</sup> Thereafter, both Dawkins and Dennett refused to debate him, citing reasons ranging from them being too bored to debate him to Lane-Craig being too pompous to him being

morally bankrupt.<sup>5,6</sup> Nobody was particularly convinced by these excuses, except maybe the most naïve of their followers.

Dawkins initially rose to fame with his controversial book, *The God Delusion*, in which he argued against the existence of God and argued that religion was generally harmful to the world we inhabit.<sup>7</sup> Using his background as a biologist, Dawkins aimed to use evolution as an overarching paradigm to replace metaphysics and much else.

Harris, meanwhile, gained notoriety through his YouTube channel and his books, such as *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*, in which he argued for a secular morality based on science and humanistic principles. Though he argues against religion in general—apparently completely aloof to the fact that he is promoting the religion of New Atheism—Harris saves his most bitter words for Islam. True to his moral relativism-cum-bankruptcy, he goes as far as to consider a ‘plausible’ thought experiment in which America—the only country in the world to have dropped an atomic bomb on a civilian population—must pre-emptively strike Muslim lands in an untargeted manner out of fear that Muslims may strike ‘us’ first. This pre-emptive strike, he writes, may be “the only course of action available to us.”<sup>8</sup> So much for humanist morals.

Following in the genocidal theme, we arrive at the late Hitchens, infamous for his support of the US-led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the general anti-Muslim wars that have now led to well over a million deaths.<sup>9</sup> Any moral being would shudder at this number of civilian deaths, yet Harris postulates that this may just be the beginning of a wider war with Islam.<sup>8</sup> Though, try as they may to defeat Islam, it remains on the rise, and the number of Muslims has nearly doubled over the past 70 years alone.<sup>10</sup>

Dennett is the last of the four heads of New Atheism, and his background is in philosophy and cognitive science. To Dennett, religion can be understood as a evolutionary socio-cultural phenomenon, and it should be argued for or against on purely utilitarian grounds.<sup>11</sup> The unspoken-but-understood part of Dennett’s arguments is that the New Atheists should be the ultimate judges of what is good and what is not, not the faithful masses of the world. Perhaps the hideousness of his worldviews are why Dennett also refuses to engage in serious debates with theists.<sup>6</sup>

These four fathers of the New Atheist movement are joined by a few other well-known proponents, such as Lawrence Krauss—who was intellectually rugby tackled some years ago by my dear friend Hamza Tzortzis; Aron Ra—an ex-Mormon atheist sceptic and member of The Satanic Temple; and Matt Dillahunty—television and radio host and atheist activist. Whilst there are very few women spearheading the New Atheist project,

there are some exceptions, such as Rebecca Watson—prominent feminist, secularist, and New Atheism proponent.

Under this leadership, New Atheism gained significant traction in a post-Christian West that was yearning for answers to life's ultimate questions. Many people once hoped that the New Atheists would provide these answers, though that has now proven not to be the case. The major philosophical questions of yesteryear are no more settled now than they were in the past.

The rather poor understanding of religion and philosophy demonstrated by the leaders of New Atheism came to light in their poor debate performances, as well as in the poor rationalising efforts within their books. Michael Ruse, an atheist and prominent philosopher of biology, has argued that New Atheism adopts many of the same dogmatic approaches to problems that it seeks to criticise theists for.<sup>12</sup>

When scrutinised at any depth, it becomes clear that New Atheism is very much a religion, albeit a dead one that was never particularly useful for the world at large. Ruse has been a vocal critic of the New Atheist movement and has even expressed embarrassment at being an atheist because of Dawkins' flawed arguments, stating that he believes Dawkins is so poor at philosophy that he would not pass an undergraduate-level exam in the subject.<sup>13</sup>

This sentiment is shared by Keith Ward—fellow of the British Academy, priest of the Church of England, and an ex-canon of Christ Church, Oxford—who wrote that “when he enters into the world of philosophy, his passion tends to get the better of him, and he sometimes descends into stereotyping, pastiche and mockery, no longer approaching the arguments with his usual seriousness and care.”<sup>14</sup>

There are four primary reasons for the downfall of New Atheism:

1. its arguments for atheism were identified as lacklustre and incomplete, meaning they did not resonate strongly with a wider audience;
2. it offered no true alternative to religion, focusing instead on scepticism and the hatred of others—this void of meaning and significance made it a difficult home for any true seeker of truth and beauty to inhabit;
3. internal divisions within the movement over issues ranging from feminism and transsexuality to politics and freedoms led to disagreements among key figures and factions—these divisions

- showcased an internal weakness and made the movement seem rather unappealing to those looking for somewhere to go; and
4. the movement's extremism and hateful approach to theists spiralled into unsustainable levels of intolerance.

The fourth of these points is often overlooked but shouldn't be. Sociologically, this phenomenon of increasing bitterness towards the 'other' is well-understood. McCarthyism in the 1950s in the USA began as an anti-communist crusade before spiralling into paranoia and blacklisting, targeting not only communists themselves but all those deemed insufficiently patriotic. Similarly, in his book, *The God Delusion*, Dawkins critiques not only the faithful, but all those he considers to be insufficiently full of hatred for the faithful.

The incessant yearning for ideological 'purity' among the New Atheists follows in this vein of intolerance and uncompromising dogmatism. Again, from a purely sociological perspective, this is a known trait of extremist factions and often leads to their demise. The Athesitic Khmer Rouge regime, in 1970s Cambodia, began as a communist insurgency before taking power and launching extreme social engineering efforts—even killing millions—in the name of ideological purity.

Dogmatism is blinding. In the case of New Atheism, their commitment to materialist humanism meant that they were never well-versed in philosophy, theology, or much else. Worse still, they were patently flawed in their reasonings, but refused to accept anything other than the tenets of the belief system they had now adopted.

Whenever a movement is so zealously ambitious in its early stages, there is a high chance of it falling short and disappointing its members. Bearing in mind that New Atheism's primary aim as a movement has always been to discourage people from belief in God, and bearing in mind that the religion the four founders of New Atheism hate most is clearly Islam, one can appreciate how monumentally they have failed in their mission.

The reader should be aware, however, that the New Atheist hatred for religion and metaphysics is not shared by every agnostic or even every atheist thinker. In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins not only critiques religion but also challenges agnostics and even fellow atheists whom he perceives as accommodating theists. He specifically labels Ruse as a modern-day sellout to the cause of rationality. Ruse, a staunch Darwinian and a respected authority on the philosophy of evolutionary biology, wrote after Dawkins' attack on him: "Dawkins has likened me to the pusillanimous appeaser at Munich, Neville Chamberlain."<sup>15</sup> Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister before World War II, attempted to appease Hitler but was ultimately

betrayed and removed from power. Winston Churchill famously opposed this appeasement, succeeding Chamberlain and leading Britain to victory in the war. The underlying message is clear: Dawkins urges atheists to be more confrontational regarding religion, asserting that anyone—atheists included—who do not fully align with this approach are part of the problem. His stance reflects a “with us or against us” mentality. When I asked Ruse for his thoughts on Dawkins’ remarks, he responded with equal candor:

“If you look at *The God Delusion*, he isn’t very good at philosophy. Obviously, he knows how to write a bestseller; he certainly knows that. He knows how to use the rhetoric and everything like that. As I say, most professors of philosophy, if a student handed this in for a first course, they would fail them.”<sup>13</sup>

Ruse offers a thoughtful critique of Dawkins while sharing significant common ground. Both are strong proponents of Darwinian evolution, rooted in Charles Darwin’s principles. Ruse appreciates Dawkins’ influential writings which have revolutionised the understanding of evolution by suggesting that genes, rather than individual organisms or species, are the primary units of natural selection. This shift emphasizes that behaviors typically seen as altruistic may actually serve the reproductive success of genes.

The concept of the selfish gene has sparked extensive debate in various fields, including biology, psychology, and sociology, encouraging exploration into genetic influences on behavior, cooperation, and altruism. This theory has reshaped our comprehension of evolutionary processes and the motivations behind behaviors in both animals and humans.

Dawkins and Ruse share common ground in their commitment to Darwinism; both criticize intelligent design, emphasizing the importance of evidence-based naturalistic reasoning in understanding the biological world. Where they differ is in their philosophical and theological views. Ruse thinks Dawkins oversteps the boundaries of science and makes faulty arguments without realizing how incoherent he sounds. In the same interview, Ruse stated:

“If you read his stuff, I mean he really is, as it were, overly self-confident; let’s put it that way, about what he is saying. Obviously, it goes down well with the troops, but I’m not quite sure how deeply it is. In many respects, I think *The Selfish Gene* is a work of genius. I don’t want to detract from that. I think Dawkins caught an idea of what was going on there in sociobiology and individual selection and those things. I think he spotted it, wrote about it in terms

that I think are absolutely remarkably good, so please understand I'm not just, as it were, putting the boot to Richard Dawkins. But I think since then, as it were, maybe he's just a one-stop hero or whatever it is. Because I just don't think that the stuff he has done recently, and certainly *The God Delusion*, is anything like as good; in any sense it really isn't very good. It really reads to me as being written by somebody who's overly self-confident, who's had so much success with his first book that he thinks what he says must by definition be right because I, Richard Dawkins, have said it. I do want to put this in context; if you see what Richard Dawkins says about me in *The God Delusion*, I've got reason to be pissed off. So I do want to emphasize that I really think *The Selfish Gene* is a work of genius, and I can only say I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it, so at that level, please understand I'm saying there is a side to Richard Dawkins which really leaves me breathless because it is so good. But there is also a side to Richard Dawkins which leaves me breathless because it is so bloody awful.”<sup>13</sup>

I wanted to delve deeper and genuinely understand why two atheists, like Ruse and Dawkins—both outspoken supporters of atheism—hold such differing views on God. I inquired whether Ruse believed that Dawkins’ contrasting perspective stems from his adherence to scientism, the unwarranted belief that science can explain everything, including the existence of God. Indeed, Dawkins has made it clear that he considers the question of God to be within the realm of science, whereas traditionally, such inquiries have been the domain of philosophy. Dawkins has previously stated that “the existence of God is a scientific hypothesis like any other.” So I asked Ruse:

“Do you think the reason why Richard Dawkins holds on to the positions he does, and you hold onto your position is because fundamentally, from an epistemic standpoint, you're not as tempted towards scientism as he is because you see questions as being addressed not only by science but also by philosophy, and perhaps he is more along the lines of trying to answer all questions from a scientific perspective?”

Ruse replied: “Yeah, I think that's true. I mean, I don't know about the psychology of Richard Dawkins, but my suspicion is that he's been so successful with his books, *The Selfish Gene* and now this one, he is just convinced that what he says must be right. I can understand that; if I wrote a book that sold 5 million copies, I would be inclined to say, you know, I think I might be right.”<sup>13</sup>

The primary issue with Dawkins' book is his unjustified scientific perspective on the question of God. He adheres to scientism—the notion that science is the ultimate source of knowledge, applicable to every domain, including metaphysical and theological matters. His arguments are heavily reliant on this framework. If scientism is demonstrated to be flawed, the foundations of his arguments would be completely compromised.

## CHAPTER 2

# On Scientism: The False Lens

A major reason for the waywardness of the New Atheists is their unsubstantiated commitment to scientism. This is the lens through which they view the world, and so they are unable to see reality polychromatically. Scientism is the belief that the natural sciences are the ultimate or only valid source of knowledge. It may be divided into epistemic scientism—the belief that natural scientific methods are the only legitimate way to acquire knowledge, rejecting metaphysics and theology—and ideological scientism—the overextension of scientific principles into areas where they do not apply, such as when using the natural sciences to justify moral or philosophical claims that transcend them.

Scientism is a reductionist philosophy that is not grounded on any first principles. Its adherents have no proof of their claim that the natural sciences are the only valid source of knowledge. Alex Rosenberg—an atheist, naturalist, and Professor of Philosophy at Duke University—defined scientism as:

“...the conviction that the methods of science are the only reliable ways to secure knowledge of anything; that science’s description of the world is correct in its fundamentals... Science provides all the significant truths about reality, and knowing such truths is what real understanding is all about... Being scientistic just means treating science as our exclusive guide to reality, to nature—both our own nature and everything else’s.”<sup>1</sup>

Their argument rests on the claim that metaphysics and anything immaterial (i.e. anything that is not made of matter or energy) has no proof for its existence. Like atheism, adherents of scientism hide in the corner of scepti-

cism—they aim to prove nothing but to deny everything, hoping that this lays the burden of proof on the faithful. It is an interesting premise and one that we need to tackle seriously if we are to philosophise with any purpose.

Nevertheless, despite its interestingness, it remains seriously flawed and incoherent, both internally and with the external reality. Adherents of scientism behave as though their philosophy is a certainty that has been built upon unshakeable first principles. This is a colossal error and one we hope to unpack here. Using their own habit of scepticism against them, one can begin to unravel the many assumptions and unsupported beliefs they rely upon.

'Scepticism' in a broad sense, seems easy—surely, one just needs to say, "Not convinced!" to any and all arguments that come their way? Not quite. The reality is more complicated and nuanced, and scepticism is more like a spectrum, with a rough overview presented below:

1. Pyrrhonian scepticism: a complete suspension of judgement (in Hellenistic philosophy, this is referred to as *epoché*) to the extent that all claims to any knowledge are rejected—this includes even 'sceptical' claims, such as, 'nothing other than matter and energy exists', and intuitable claims, such as, 'a physical world exists';<sup>2</sup>
2. Cartesian/methodological scepticism: the use of doubt as a tool to arrive at firm conclusions based on foundational truths—this is more an approach than a belief system, making it difficult to insert into this list accurately, but it is linked inextricably to René Descartes' wider philosophy of mechanism and the material world being entirely independent from the metaphysical or spiritual world (this is an oversimplification of Descartes' dualism or dual-aspect monism, depending on how one reads him);<sup>3</sup>
3. Academic scepticism: accepts that knowledge is possible but allows for probable beliefs—the 'Academy', here, refers to the period of the Academy in ancient Greece from around 266 BC to 90 CE, which coincides with the period in which Arcesilaus became scholarch and until Antiochus rejected scepticism;<sup>4,5</sup>
4. fallibilism: the belief that whilst certain knowledge is not possible, provisional knowledge is—this is similar to Academic scepticism but tends to be a little softer in the practical applications of its theory, as its adherents behave as though knowledge is valid and proper, just that one can never be sure that this knowledge will not later be disproven;<sup>6</sup>

5. Humean/moderate empirical scepticism: this is a vague category which tries to subsume the beliefs of the more modern empiricists who followed Hume in his approach to reality—they live based on empirical principles but remain cautious as to the validity of any truth claims;<sup>7</sup> and
6. common-sense realism: the acceptance of apparent perceptions as coherent and largely reliable, limiting scepticism to more extraordinary claims.<sup>8</sup>

So, where do the New Atheists fit along this spectrum? An exact answer is difficult to give as, unlike Sextus Empiricus, Descartes, Hume, and others, the New Atheists are amateur philosophers who slip and slide between positions depending on what they are arguing. At times, they are moral relativists, and then, when it suits, they are willing to kill and maim whole populations due to their moral positions. At times, they are epistemologically sceptical of anything beneath certain knowledge, and then, when it suits, they are willing to bully and harass others based on poorly justified information. A whole essay could be written on this, but suffice it for now to say that this is a result of them being weak philosophers, unprincipled thinkers, and ideological dogmatists.

People often accuse those who follow traditional faiths of being dogmatic, but at least these faithful many are honest about their persuasions and internally coherent in their paradigms. If the truth is—as they claim—that God has revealed something of knowledge unto them, then it makes complete sense that this knowledge be certain and of an epistemologically higher weight than other forms of knowledge which are dependent on lower faculties. Contrast this to the dogmatism of the New Atheists who position themselves as sceptics whilst also fiercely calling for the invasion of foreign lands and the indoctrination of children into their ideology and against the will of their parents (Dawkins has gone as far as to suggest that being raised a Catholic (as opposed to an atheist) is more damaging to a child than being sexually abused by a priest).<sup>9,10</sup>

New Atheists largely fit in the regions of fallibilism and Humean scepticism in their approach towards religion, whilst they move closer towards common-sense realism in their approach to all else. This is to say that they are largely empiricists who believe that knowledge is never truly certain and that we can only approach certainty through empirical verification. Hume famously raised concerns with certain knowledge gained through empirical reasoning. Hume also rejected anything that was not identifiable and empirically testable as truly existing. Similarly, our New Atheists reject anything they cannot empirically observe.

They may feel justified in this position, but it really is a weak one. At ‘best’ any adherent to such a position must admit—openly and clearly—that they have not and cannot disprove God or the probability of God existing. Any non-empirical discussion is a discussion they need to be agnostic about, as they have—according to their own paradigm—no access to such knowledge and no possible means to reach such knowledge.

Further, the New Atheists would need to follow Hume’s principles to their logical conclusions and aver that even empirical knowledge, which is gathered through inductive reasoning, is fallible and uncertain. And whilst they often will admit as much, they do not behave as though that is true. They are quite often dogmatic about scientific theories which are, according to the Humean paradigm, fully able to be disproven should new knowledge arrive. Hume wrote:

“Our foregoing method of reasoning will easily convince us, that there can be no demonstrative arguments to prove, that those instances, of which we have had no experience, resemble those, of which we have had experience. We can at least conceive a change in the course of nature; which sufficiently proves, that such a change is not absolutely impossible. To form a clear idea of any thing, is an undeniable argument for its possibility, and is alone a refutation of any pretended demonstration against it.”<sup>11</sup>

Hume was far more radical than people give him credit for. He argued not only that empiricism—of which he was a leading proponent—only ever provides uncertain knowledge, but that all basic beliefs about the external world are not more than assumptions based on patterns and memories. There is no logical compulsion to believe that the laws of nature are constant and will remain constant going forward, Hume argues, and so any belief in physics or chemistry that assumes the existence of ‘laws’ in nature is a belief that requires a leap of faith. Even stranger, there is no logical compulsion to believe that the world we observe actually exists when we are not observing it. To Hume, the best we can do, and all we should do, is deal with what we have based on custom and experience. Reason is pointless and a façade—were we truly rational, Hume argues, then we ought to all be Pyrrhonian sceptics, but there is something inherent within our natures that prevents this (notice how close Hume was to identifying the *fitrah* [natural predisposition] of man!). He wrote:

“Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone, which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us

expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom, we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact, beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses. We should never know how to adjust means to ends, or to employ our natural powers in the production of any effect. There would be an end at once of all action, as well as of the chief part of speculation.”<sup>12</sup>

Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* are where he infamously argued against the ability of pure reason for establishing the existence of God. New Atheists often jump to this without realising what they are doing. Hume only argued that our mental faculties were unable to definitively prove the existence of God—he did not establish arguments against the existence of God. Moreover, the same arguments he used against theism are just as usable against atheism and scientism. “Custom,” Hume argued, was “the great guide of human life”—and so it follows that, according to Hume’s logic, unthinking theism is as justified as atheism and a belief in God is as justified as a belief in the external world being real.

In our spectrum of scepticism, at the least sceptical end of the spectrum, we placed ‘common-sense realism’. This was the philosophy of Thomas Reid, who was Hume’s contemporary and countryman, and was better known as a philosopher during their shared era. Reid argued that common sources of belief, such as testimony, perception, rational thought, and all else, were valid sources of knowledge. He even considered our innate moral sense, aesthetic appreciations, and yearning for God (what Muslims would most likely refer to as the *fitrah*). To Muslims, this line of reasoning is nothing new and it fits quite well into how many scholars historically understood the beliefs of laypeople. This belief was always considered entirely justified and to be a gift from God. When human yearning and humility was coupled with God’s gift of faith, then one truly believed, even in the absence of reasoning from abstract first principles.

Keith Ward, whom we referenced in the previous chapter, wrote at some length on Hume, Reid, and the shortcomings of radical empiricism. His dissection of Humean empiricism and its internal contradictions is remarkably insightful and worth quoting here at some length. Ward writes:

“... Hume’s theory is the *reductio ad absurdum* of radical Empiricism. I agree with Thomas Reid that we are certain that there is an external world that necessarily acts in accordance with general laws of nature, there are other conscious minds and other impressions of which we can have no personal experience, and there is

an active and continuous self that reflects upon its impressions and ideas, perceives resemblances between them, and constructs philosophical theories to account for their existence. I am sure David Hume thought so too. Why, then, did he have a theory that reduced rational certainty to mere habit and custom, and pretend that an obscure and radical Empiricism, founded upon highly contentious premises, was actually the certain foundation of all human knowledge?

In short, if Hume was going to be sceptical about the capacities of human reason, why was he not more sceptical about his own dogmatic Empiricism, about the extraordinary opinion that every item of genuine knowledge must be traced back to the occurrence of specific and discrete impressions?

The obvious alternative to Hume's theory is that knowledge does not result solely from the passive occurrence of impressions. Knowledge results from the activity of the mind, considering and comparing its experiences, and imaginatively constructing models that can clarify and explain how and why our experiences occur as they do.

Hume says that we have no impression of a self, so that there is no justification in postulating one. But the self is known precisely in the activity of considering questions like that of whether all our knowledge derives solely from sense-impressions. The self is the active agent that asks what can best account for its experiences. This does not foreclose the question of whether the self is spiritual or physical, a property of the brain or a thinking substance. But it establishes that we have knowledge of the self, not by having a particular discrete impression of it, but by reflecting on the activity of thinking.”<sup>12</sup>

This is not to deny that knowledge is largely grounded on experiences and impressions, but it is to admit the rather obvious fact that something more is going on. When a being thinks, considers, recalls, compares, and restructures, he is not just being impressed upon by the external world—he is actively making sense of it; he is rationalising. And as he rationalises and realises that he does, in fact, exist, so, too, does he rationalise and realise that a higher structure exists—he sees mathematics and the laws of nature as being structured and beautiful, precise and measured—and from this he rationalises that an Organiser exists. There is, after all, no need for the laws of nature and mathematics to be consistent, to be intelligible, and to be beautiful. The chances of this all being random—if we, for argument’s

sake, pretend that existence itself ‘just is’—is infinitely small. And why does it all even make sense in the first place? Evolutionary speaking, there is no reason why a being’s understanding of reality needs to match that reality. All that is needed is for one’s perception of reality to offer a survival benefit, however warped and incorrect that perception may be.

Dawkins often wishes to sit in the niche created by Democritus, Epicurus, and Hume, with the former two rejecting any metaphysics beyond atomism and the latter rejecting any knowledge beyond empiricism. We have already alluded to some of the holes within this reasoning and how, even if it were to be accepted, it would be nothing more than an argument for radical scepticism. The New Atheists do not seem to understand this at all. Their positions necessarily lead to: pure moral relativity, pure meaninglessness, and pure subjectivity of thought—there is no statement objectively more true than another in that paradigm. In fact, this subjectivity extends even to their own claim of scepticism, and so it self defeats and necessarily leads the Humean sceptic to Pyrrhonian scepticism. Dawkins, Harris, Dennett, and Hitchens cower from this realisation. The examples of them cowering are almost uncountable by now. Just ask yourself, how many of the New Atheists actually stick to the moral relativity their philosophy entails (clue: the answer is less than one).

Hume was different. Whilst a radical and extreme thinker, he was definitely no amateur philosopher and logician, meaning he knew there were certain logical conclusions he could not shy away from. Hume seemed to appreciate that his belief system would lead to Pyrrhonian scepticism if followed through logically, meaning that it would be so sceptical as to destabilise even its own claims of scepticism, and all that could be left was apathy, indifference, and death. He wrote:

“For here is the chief and most confounding objection to excessive scepticism, that no durable good can ever result from it; while it remains in its full force and vigour. We need only ask such a sceptic, What his meaning is? And what he proposes by all these curious researches? He is immediately at a loss, and knows not what to answer. A Copernican or Ptolemaic, who supports each his different system of astronomy, may hope to produce a conviction, which will remain constant and durable, with his audience. A Stoic or Epicurean displays principles, which may not only be durable, but which have an effect on conduct and behaviour. But a Pyrrhonian cannot expect that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind: Or it is had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowl-

edge, if he will acknowledge any thing, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus, this empiricism-cum-scientism that the New Atheists adhere to is not grounded on anything except self-defeating radical scepticism held back by a desire not to cause complete apathy—hardly solid ground on which to build a worldview. Yet build they do and fall they must, for scientism’s shortcomings go even further.

Around 200 years after Hume, a consortium of scientists and philosophers from around Europe developed the Vienna Circle of Logical Empiricists. This consortium argued that meaningful statements must either be logically provable or empirically verifiable, leading them to dismiss metaphysical claims as meaningless. Alfred Ayer, member of the Vienna Circle, wrote, “The statement ‘God exists’ is not a factual statement, nor is it a statement that can be verified.”<sup>14</sup> He further clarified his position, writing, “All meaningful propositions are either *a priori* propositions or empirically verifiable.”<sup>15</sup> Empirical verification was paramount—if something could not be physically sensed, it was to be dismissed—and any philosophical discourse unrelated to empirical phenomena was considered irrelevant. This 20<sup>th</sup> century logical positivism laid the groundwork for the scientism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, the New Atheists seem unaware of the assumptions they are having to make to adopt such a worldview, as well as the consequences of doing so. Logical positivism does not argue against God, it just argues that God is ultimately unknowable, but even this is based on flawed reasoning and the unwarranted assumption that empiricism is the only way to know. Ayer’s earlier statements are themselves non-empirical and unverified—why on earth should they be privileged over the claims he wishes to dismiss? Both the statement, ‘The statement ‘God exists’ is not a factual statement, nor is it a statement that can be verified’, and the statement, ‘All meaningful propositions are either *a priori* propositions or empirically verifiable’, are non-empirical, non-verifiable statements. It is an entirely self-refuting position—it proves itself wrong.

Further, even in the study of the natural sciences, we have moved beyond logical empiricism. We now know that there are many unobservable yet understood phenomena whose true nature we do not understand and may never understand. It may well be the case that understanding these phenomena is beyond the scope of human capacity. Why should we be so blindly

optimistic as to assume that our biological brains composed of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, and liquids must be able to comprehend everything in the universe that truly exists? And why should we be forced to accept that these same lumps of organic tissue must be able to sense everything that exists in the world? These are not only unverified claims, they are patently at odds with how scientists work. Quarks, bosons, fields, multiverses, and so much more are theorised but not empirically measured. Who, in their right mind, would dismiss it all as ‘meaningless’ and untrue because it is not empirically verifiable to us at present (and maybe ever)? In fact, all fields of science are theory-laden and full of non-empirical rationalisations. There is no independent language of empiricism which moves from one observation to another without being utterly dependent on non-empirical rationalisations. Even observable phenomena have multiple competing theories of justification which require rationalisation and choices.

This is not only the case in physics and the rest of the natural sciences—we find it to be true, also, of mathematical facts, which are clearly neither empirically observable nor simply tautologies. Are the New Atheists going to abandon all of mathematics because they can’t sense it? Or are they going to grant exceptions to everything that comes along to disprove their claims? And, then, what about value statements? These are also not able to be sensed, but most people in the world are certain they are true. New Atheists are committed to saying that all value statements, all moral claims, are made up for some selfish advantage or other. Maybe that is easy for them to say, but it is not so for us—it is not easy for all those who see good as truly being good and evil as truly being evil, not some pantomime of emotionally concocted, evolutionarily driven, selfish morality. Historical statements similarly—we are happy to sentence people for crimes based on historical facts that are no longer empirically observable and may never have been observed by those passing judgement. That goes to show just how much of human thoughts and beliefs are rationalised. All human experience—consciousness, emotions, qualia—is not verifiable empirically. The list goes on and on.

These realisations meant that logical positivism/empiricism began to die and decrease in popularity as a school of thought in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and until its more recent incarnation under the guise of New Atheism. During this same period, the natural sciences (not scientism) had also been advancing as individual disciplines. One notable development came through the work of Karl Popper, an Austrian-British philosopher who revolutionised what it meant to do science. His contribution deserves some attention and unpacking, especially as it is often misunderstood or mis-

appropriated, and especially as it touches on another major philosophical problem in the natural sciences.

We mentioned earlier that the logical positivists had argued that “All meaningful propositions are either *a priori* propositions or empirically verifiable.”<sup>15</sup> Popper introduced a concept known as falsifiability into the equation.<sup>16</sup> Consider the following statement: “All men are white.” Through the logical positivist paradigm, this statement could never be proven. If an alien landed on earth and saw a white man, would it prove the statement to be true? No. If he saw 100 white men and no black ones, would that then prove it? No. If he saw 1,000,000 white men and no black ones, would that finally prove it? No. And this inability to prove the claim through further empirical data would continue. This problem reflected a major intellectual dilemma noted by David Hume, and it was known as the problem of induction.

In less allegorical terms, Hume noted that we use inductive reasoning to make generalisations and predictions that are based on past observations. However, we have absolutely no compulsion to believe that the future will resemble the past. Therefore, our inductive conclusions can only ever be assumptions and not certain facts. Claims—such as, “the sun will rise every morning”—that are based on empirical observations are impossible to prove logically, as arguments to prove it may be either inductive or deductive. No sensible deductive argument that avoids leaps of faith (e.g. the laws of physics will continue to apply tomorrow) can be made, and using an inductive argument to justify and prove induction would be circular. If one appeals to experience, experiments, and repeatability by saying, “this has worked before” or “this has been shown to be the case when I tested it,” then he would be using another inductive argument and will not have escaped the paradox. And, thus, science becomes circular.

“So, what?” you may be thinking, if something is circular—it seems to work, after all. However, the issue with this reasoning is that many self-referencing and circular paradigms may appear entirely justified internally—they seem to work—but when external knowledge comes to challenge them, the truth is made clear. Furthermore, if one is to accept that circular reasoning is completely justified if the paradigm that results is itself internally coherent, then arguments like “there is a God because there just is a God” become wholly rational, and many people find that to be an incredibly unsatisfying argument. Michel Foucault discussed this very phenomenon at length when explaining that in each episteme throughout human history, there have been an incredible amount of internally justifiable truths that the following episteme dismisses and considers baseless.<sup>17</sup>

Karl Popper needed to rescue science from this paradox. He was not able to solve the problem of induction—that remains a problem for philosophers of science to this day, and it means that facts in the natural sciences remain epistemologically inferior to mathematical truths and deductive arguments—but he did find another way out. Popper decided that arguments were never truly verifiable through positive evidence, and that, instead, scientists should focus on forming arguments that were falsifiable.<sup>16</sup> In other words, he accepted that we can never prove a universal statement through observations, but held that, as we can disprove a universal statement with just a single counterexample (e.g. if someone claims that all swans are black, then seeing a single white swan would disprove them), scientists should focus on producing falsifiable arguments and testing them. The natural sciences were no longer seen as providing certain logical truths through induction; they were now seen as tools that could provide provisional theories which have survived attempts at falsification, with the theories remaining open to future falsifications. As a side note it is important to highlight that although Popper is often cited in discussions on philosophy of science his ideas on falsification have fallen out of favour. The field has progressed significantly with influential figures such as Thomas Kuhn, Imre Lakatos, Paul Feyerabend, Pierre Duhem and Willard Van Orman Quine. Despite these advancements the point of convergence for philosophers of science is still that scientific conclusions are provisional at best and never proven. Philosophers Gillian Barker and Philip Kitcher explain “Science is revisable. Hence, to talk of scientific ‘proof’ is dangerous, because the term fosters the idea of conclusions that are graven in stone.”<sup>18</sup>

This understanding of science is incredibly important when dealing with the repeated overstepping of New Atheist scientism. The natural sciences are unable to answer questions outside of their remit, and they are unable to arrive at any certain conclusions at the epistemological level of mathematical proofs. That is not to say no scientific theory is incredibly likely, it is to say that each theory must be given its full epistemological weight but no more than it deserves. Philosophers such as Thomas Nagel, thus, criticised the logical positivists’ rejection of metaphysics, asserting that questions about existence, morality, and meaning can never be fully answered through empirical methods alone.<sup>19</sup>

These challenges to logical positivism were never resolved. New Atheists have not addressed them in any meaningful or satisfying way. Instead, they have just ignored them and continued to preach to the uninformed. One must bear in mind that New Atheism and modern scientism is not just a reincarnation of logical positivism, it is a far cruder and less philosophically informed version of it. The New Atheists are not expert philosophers, and

they are very obviously unaware of many of their own blunders. In addition, their paradigm is cruder and less nuanced. Dawkins writes:

“In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”<sup>20</sup>

Dawkins rejects not just God, but morality, meaning, purpose, ethics, and all of the rest of metaphysics. He has not disproven any of them, but his paradigm of materialism and scientism means that he cannot accept the existence of anything non-physical. Others have followed him, included the late Stephen Hawking, who wrote, “... philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics. Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge.”<sup>21</sup> These people wish to expand and obfuscate the boundaries of science whilst limiting and obscuring the boundaries of philosophy and theology.

Dawkins disparages philosophy and underestimates its significance, creating a misleading divide between scientists and philosophers. He claims, “Science is not a social construct. Science’s truths were true before there were societies; will still be true after all philosophers are dead; were true before any philosophers were born; were true before there were any minds, even trilobite or dinosaur minds, to notice them.”<sup>22</sup>

In response, Pigliucci asserts, “I have never seen eye-to-eye with Dawkins. I think his famous ‘selfish genes’ view of evolution is too narrow. I maintain that his influential concept of memes is nothing but a misleading metaphor. But over the years, the most annoying attitude that Dawkins has displayed, as far as I’m concerned, is his relentless criticism of philosophy, coupled with a hopelessly naive view of science.”<sup>23</sup>

Pigliucci gave best academic treatment of the encroachment of scientism in the New Atheist movement in his paper titled *New Atheism and the Scientistic Turn in the Atheism Movement*.<sup>23</sup> Pigliucci is himself an atheist, biologist, and sceptic, but he academically dismantled his co-atheists. In return, he was attacked incessantly by the New Atheist faithful whose ad hominem attacks, such as those levelled by Jerry Coyne, reveal much about their character and true aims.<sup>24</sup> They have attacked him because they see him as a traitor to their cause, their religion—he is to them an apostate,

but he has done nothing other than point out some of their many flaws and inconsistencies.

Pigliucci has taken aim at the New Atheists' definition of science, particularly when authors such as Coyne define science as encompassing all fact-based reasoning. In an interview, I asked Pigliucci directly about Coyne's definition of science, and he had the following to say in return:

"The move there is basically to expand the definition of science so much that everything becomes science. So plumbing is a science, really? Plumbing is fact-based reasoning, practical reasoning, sure, but if we want to say that is science, then everything is science. Then for me to just come out and successfully navigate the subway system in New York City—that's also science? Sure, if you want to go that far, then we are all doing science. But that kind of eviscerates the meaning of science. When you talk to people and say this is a scientific question, they don't understand that it applies to the subway system in New York City. You know they think of chemistry, physics, biology—that sort of stuff."<sup>25</sup>

You may be wondering why this is even a problem. Why can we not let 'science' just mean 'studying'? The problem is that when we speak of science, without qualifying the word, we tend to be speaking specifically about the natural sciences. Broadening the definition means that people will routinely blur the boundary between the natural sciences and other sciences, such as mathematics. New Atheists often do this when they wish to blur lines and play rhetorical games. Further, broadening a definition so much leads to it losing its meaning almost entirely. Pigliucci commented, saying:

"This is a well-known thing in linguistics and in conceptual analysis. If you expand a concept so much that there are basically no exceptions, then it encompasses almost everything out there, and the concept loses meaning. If everything is science, then to say this is a scientific question tells you nothing—you are just saying, 'This is a question.' Okay, you want to go that way, then be my guest, but it's not very useful."<sup>26</sup>

In his book, *The God Delusion*, Dawkins tries to narrow down theism to a scientific claim, like other claims within the natural sciences. He resorts to arguments from improbability, which are all uncertain, but, to his credit, such arguments are often invoked within the natural sciences to arrive at uncertain conclusions. However, his attempts become incredibly laughable when he tries to use these same methods to challenge metaphysical claims,

such as the belief in God and miracles. Pigliucci attacks Dawkins over this, saying “there is no coherent or sensible way in which the idea of God can possibly be considered a ‘hypothesis’ in any sense remotely resembling the scientific sense of the term.”<sup>21</sup>

Consider a simple understanding of God as the One who created all else and exists outside of time and space, transcending all that is physical, having no beginning or end, and resembling nothing. All dependencies found in material substances are not found in Him. How could any scientific experiment possibly reach such a being? It could not. And every intelligent person sees this.

Pigliucci himself is no friend of religion, nor is he a less faithful atheist than Dawkins. The reason he criticises the latter is precisely because he does not wish for atheism to be built on flawed logic, weak philosophy, and naive populism. To Pigliucci, the worst development in the atheistic movement, and what separates the New Atheists from their forbears, is scientism. He identifies three primary reasons why scientism is detrimental to even the atheist intellectual cause:<sup>21</sup>

1. Scientism is philosophically unsound. Pigliucci avers that this arises from the broadening of the definition of science so much that it eventually loses any useful meaning, similar to how philosophy was often used to mean anything to do with thought, something he declares to “be a puerile and useless exercise.”
2. Scientism harms the atheist religion both internally and externally.
  - ◆ Internally: the New Atheists mischaracterise scientific endeavour, leading new graduates and young scientists to misunderstand what it means to do science. A broad and useless definition does not help these budding scientists progress in their studies and sub-disciplines.
  - ◆ Externally: the arrogance and anti-intellectualism displayed by the New Atheists causes public opinion to become hateful towards them. The public, most of who are uninformed regarding the differences between science and scientism, conflate the errors of the New Atheists with errors in science itself. USA is currently struggling with much anti-science across the country, ranging from flat earthers to those denying space travel—and this will only worsen unless people begin to see more intelligent, more nuanced positions than those that the New Atheists forward in the name of science.

3. By rejecting philosophy, the New Atheists make a weak and unfinished argument for atheism that does not address important questions. The New Atheists do not wish to only give science primacy over philosophy, they wish to completely do away with the latter. Pigliucci believes this undermines the very intellectual foundations of atheism on which his beliefs rest—making the case for atheism weaker and leading to a useless self-defeating scepticism. Pigliucci wishes to defend atheism, but he abhors the use of flawed arguments by the New Atheists, seeing this as damaging to both science and atheism.

Ultimately, to most of the world, it is clear that many fundamental questions cannot be answered purely through the natural sciences. That does not mean that those questions are not worth answering or that they are, in any way, inferior questions to those answered by scientific enquiry. Nor does it mean that science is, in any way, evil. All it does is put science in its proper place, giving it all the respect it deserves but no more. Did Genghis Khan exist? What caused World War I? What is the proof of Pythagoras' theorem? In propositional logic, does *modus ponens* hold? In epistemology, what constitutes knowledge? Science, alone, cannot answer any of these, and almost all questions in life are of this sort.

Clearly, then, science does not have all the answers, and it is not the only means to knowledge. It is a means among means. However, logic, mathematics, philosophy, testimony, and, for the spiritually inclined, gnosis are other examples of ways to know. Science cannot see beyond itself and when the New Atheists try to make it do so, they are engaging in a clear category error. Describing the world in increasingly granular scientific detail does nothing to answer the ‘why’ questions or to prove there are no ‘why’ questions worth answering. Adding insult to the New Atheists’ injury is the ironic fact that science can never even disprove other methods of knowing, let alone identify and catalogue all of them.



## CHAPTER 3

# On the Central Argument

Rather usefully, Dawkins outlined a central argument for atheism in his most well-known book, *The God Delusion*.<sup>1</sup> It is useful precisely because it is easy to dismantle and disprove, making the wider theory that rests on it also easy to dismantle and disprove. There have been many powerful responses to Dawkins' central argument for atheism, including by William Lane Craig,<sup>2</sup> Hamza Tzortzis,<sup>3</sup> Alistair McGrath,<sup>4</sup> Michael Ruse,<sup>5</sup> and others, and we will lean upon some of these authors for our current purpose in this chapter.

In Dawkins' own structure, his central argument is as follows:<sup>1</sup>

1. One of the greatest challenges to the human intellect, over the centuries, has been to explain how the complex, improbable appearance of design in the universe arises.
2. The natural temptation is to attribute the appearance of design to actual design itself. In the case of a man-made artifact, such as a watch, the designer really was an intelligent engineer. It is tempting to apply the same logic to an eye or a wing, a spider or a person.
3. The temptation is a false one because the designer hypothesis immediately raises the larger problem of who designed the designer. The whole problem we started out with was the problem of explaining statistical improbability. It is obviously no solution to postulate something even more improbable. We need a 'crane,' not a 'skyhook,' for only a crane can do the business of working up gradually and plausibly from simplicity to otherwise improbable complexity.

4. The most ingenious and powerful crane so far discovered is Darwinian evolution by natural selection. Darwin and his successors have shown how living creatures, with their spectacular statistical improbability and appearance of design, have evolved by slow, gradual degrees from simple beginnings. We can, now, safely say that the illusion of design in living creatures is just that—an illusion.
5. We don't yet have an equivalent crane for physics. Some kind of multiverse theory could, in principle, do for physics the same explanatory work as Darwinism does for biology. This kind of explanation is superficially less satisfying than the biological version of Darwinism, because it makes heavier demands on luck, but the anthropic principle entitles us to postulate far more luck than our limited human intuition is comfortable with.
6. We should not give up hope of a better crane arising in physics, something as powerful as Darwinism is for biology, but even in the absence of a strongly satisfying crane to match the biological one, the relatively weak cranes we have at present are, when abetted by the anthropic principle, self-evidently better than the self-defeating skyhook hypothesis of an intelligent designer.

To any serious logician, metaphysician, or philosopher, this argument reeks of amateurism and clear logical errors. Dawkins was attempting to produce an argument against God, and the best he could come up with absolutely failed at that task. William Lane Craig mentions, "... what he calls the 'central argument' of *The God Delusion*—his argument that concludes, 'therefore, God almost certainly does not exist—is a tissue of fallacies. Even if you granted every one of his points, which are, themselves, moot, the conclusion doesn't follow from those propositions... The central argument of the book is vacuous; it's a hole."<sup>6</sup> It is clear why Dawkins is still avoiding a debate with William Lane Craig.

However, to the uninformed atheist who is looking for validation for his views, or to the non-committed theist who is wishing to leave his views for a world of vice, and for all those who are swayed by charismatic personalities regurgitating Dawkinsian views with confidence and a sense of authority, these arguments have an impact. Therefore, it is right that we take the arguments seriously and explain their shortcomings, instead of just dismissing them.

One major issue with Dawkins' arguments is that he tried to make a definitive claim using inductive—as opposed to deductive—reasoning. Deductive reasoning begins with general premises and reaches assured

conclusions based on these premises. In other words, if the premises are true, then the conclusions must be true. In this way, arguments move from general concepts to specific cases. For example, a deductive argument may be as follows:

- P<sub>1</sub>: All humans are sentient.  
P<sub>2</sub>: William Shakespeare was a human.  
C<sub>1</sub>: Therefore, William Shakespeare was sentient.

If P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub> are true—avoiding word games and misinterpretations—then C<sub>1</sub> must be true. This is known as deductive reasoning.

Inductive reasoning—what Dawkins employs—is different, as it uses patterns and generalisations based on limited observations to make uncertain claims about other cases. This is seen in Dawkins claiming that his understanding of how multiplicity is formed in nature means that a similar process in physics is likely. Not only is it a case of inductive reasoning being used in philosophy, it is a poor attempt at it.

A logician analysing an argument may employ the following terminology to describe it:

1. Deductive reasoning:

- ◆ Validity—when the premises of a valid deductive argument are true, its conclusion must be true. If this is not the case, then the argument is considered invalid.
- ◆ Soundness—when a deductive argument is valid and it has true premises, it is considered sound. Otherwise, it is considered unsound.

2. Inductive reasoning:

- ◆ Strong—when the premises of a strong inductive argument are true, its conclusion must be probably true. If this is not the case, then the argument is considered weak.
- ◆ Cogent—when an inductive argument is valid and has true premises, it is considered cogent. Otherwise, it is considered uncogent.

Since Dawkins' argument was inductive in nature, we should employ the latter terminology. Hopefully this chapter will go some way to showing just how weak and uncogent Dawkins' central argument is. He enacts

blunder after blunder—some clearly intentional and others likely due to ignorance—and we will address some of these quickly before analysing the argument in more detail, premise-by-premise, later on in this chapter.

Dawkins' flawed argumentation and feigned—or, worse, self-deluded—confidence mean that he repeatedly overreaches when he tries to make his reasoning seem more certain than it is. He convulses against the scepticism of his forbears but does not convincingly manage to escape it. He does not appreciate the circular and self-referential aspects of his inductive reasoning, nor does he appreciate the assumptions he is making to arrive at his premises in the first place. Furthermore, Dawkins' arguments, even if they are to be accepted, demonstrate a category error in which the differences between domains (e.g. biology, physics, metaphysics) are not respected. Just because naturalistic processes explain phenomenon A does not mean they will explain phenomenon B—to assume so is to make a logical leap of faith. Selective sampling errors are also present, as he uses a tiny case study in biology to make sweeping generalisations about the entire universe and all its fine tuning and beauty. Then, there is what William Lane Craig was alluding to earlier—none of Dawkins' premises, even if someone accepted every single one of them, would lead to the conclusion he reached. At most, they would mean that the design argument for God is not the best argument from an inductive reasoning point of view. This latter point shows how unequivocally weak Dawkins' argument is from a technical point of view.

We could stop this chapter here, as Dawkins' central argument is clearly impotent, but we all know that Dawkins' fans would ignore and forgive all of the above errors we mentioned. They would ignore it all or wish to trivialise it whilst still holding on to his premises and reasoning. Thus, it is preferable that we scrutinise the arguments and respond to them seriously. To make life simpler, we can rearrange Dawkins' central argument in a more formal syllogistic form, which allows us to remove the rhetorical fluff and expose his actual points, even if it does not quite transform it into a sensible argument.

Dawkins' central argument is as follows:

P1: Complex appearances require explanation.

P2: Any explanation must not introduce greater complexity than what it seeks to explain.

P3: God must be at least as complex, if not more complex, than what he has created.

C1: Therefore, God cannot explain the complexity of the world.

P4: Darwinian evolution provides a simple biological explanation for the biological complexity we see in the world.

P5: Whilst physics currently lacks an explanation for the physical complexity we see in the world, we can be hopeful that one will arise soon.

P6: The incomplete naturalistic explanations we have in physics mean that naturalism appears to be a less improbable explanation than God.

C2: Therefore, naturalistic explanations are more probable than the existence of God.

C3: Therefore, it is unlikely that there is a God.

Dawkins was not the first to use this line of reasoning. Eric Wielenberg identifies the Humean roots of Dawkins' arguments in his essay *Dawkins's Gambit, Hume's Aroma, and God's Simplicity*, writing, "the central atheistic argument of *The God Delusion* is remarkably similar to an argument advanced by the character Philo in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*."<sup>7</sup> It appears that scepticism—albeit half-baked scepticism—is not the only thing that the New Atheists borrow from Hume. However, since Hume, there has been much advancement in the field and many counter-responses forwarded. Dawkins did not address these counterarguments in his work. Regardless, let us proceed with an analysis of Dawkins' central argument, as formulated above.

### **P1: Complex appearances require explanation.**

P1 is an intuited belief, though it is also logically coherent with our experiences. When we see a plane flying in the air, we do not suspect that the plane materialised out of a random configuration of atoms, and in every experience we undergo, purposeful appearances seem to have truly purposeful causes. However, our empirical experience of the world is limited to its natural phenomena. It is impossible to prove that God must abide by these same rules just because His creation does. To even think as much is counterintuitive. Thus, to believe that P1 must be applicable to anything outside this world—be that another universe or be that the essence of God—is totally unfounded and requires a huge leap of faith.

### **P2: Any explanation must not introduce greater complexity than what it seeks to explain.**

P2 suffers from the same problem as P1. There is no logical compulsion to believe that God must have the same logical and metaphysical constraints that humans do. Further, there are many instances in which we accept super

complex-seeming theories to explain simple concepts without question, either blindly hoping that we are able to appreciate the simplicity at a later point, or accepting that such an understanding may be beyond the scope of human understanding. An easy example of this is in quantum mechanics—it is far from being a simple, unified theory, but is largely accepted as accurate. Similarly, one could accept God whilst appreciating that they do not fully understand His essence. In the Qur’ān, we read, “Vision comprehends Him not, but He comprehends [all] vision. He is the Subtle, the Aware.”<sup>8</sup> It is not necessary that you understand God and his nature in order to believe in Him. In fact, a complete understanding of God is considered by most theists to be beyond human capacity.

**P<sub>3</sub>: God must be at least as complex, if not more complex, than what he has created.**

P<sub>3</sub> is an invalid premise that has been addressed at length by theologians throughout the past millennia. Most theists can be divided into two camps on the issue: there are those who feel this matter is beyond human comprehension, and so they remain silent on the issue, and there are those who argue that God is, in fact, utterly ‘simple’, and that this fact can be understood by humans in a meaningful and useful way. To the latter group, God is seen as radically unlike His creation, and, thus, it follows that He cannot be understood in the same way His creation is understood. God is transcendent above every manner of complexity and He has no composite parts. He is ontologically superior to any and all partite entities and is entirely independent of need. The precise nature of this partlessness is disputed among nominalists and realists due to their competing paradigms of understanding, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this book. How God could know particulars without Himself being complex is another area of discussion with multiple competing responses. Dawkins failed to address any of these responses, entirely ignoring the discussion which was so central to his chief argument for atheism. It is not my aim in this book to choose between the many theological responses to this issue, but I do wish to very briefly present a range of viewpoints that represent some of the many responses Dawkins failed to address. This is just to show how unproven P<sub>3</sub> is, and just how much of a sidestep Dawkins needed to take to convey to his readers that he was using logic and not just making wild unproven assumptions.

1. Ibn Sīna proposed that God knows particulars in a universal way [*bi-nahw kulli*], through their universal causes and particulars,

feeling that this did not preclude God's knowledge of particulars and avoided adding complexity or composition to God.<sup>9</sup>

2. al-Ghazālī strongly rejected the above and argued that God knows all particulars, but that the particular/universal distinction does not apply to His knowledge—God does not have neurons which need stimulation and temporal activation to jump from premise to conclusion. Thus, one is committing themselves to a false and anthropomorphised premise if they assume that God's knowledge entails composition or contingency like it does for humans, just because particular entities are themselves discrete.<sup>10</sup>
3. Ibn Rushd argued that the way God knows transcends the way humans know, and it is neither particular nor universal, being of a higher kind altogether. He argued that since God was the cause of all creation, He can know things without having to have observed them, and that His causal knowledge would then encompass all particulars without compromising divine simplicity. Human knowledge is different, as it is receptive and involves being affected by the objects that are known.<sup>11</sup>
4. Platonic theists would often argue that particulars exist in God's knowledge on a higher plane—a more ontologically superior plane—than they do in the world, and that these instantiations of particulars that we see in the world are knowable through their higher realities that inhere within the mind of God. Thus, His knowledge, they argue, does not respond to particulars but causes them—and this knowledge, in its entirety, is ontologically simple.<sup>12</sup>
5. Aquinas believed that God knew particulars through His essence as their cause. He argued that His knowledge is not through partite ideas but through a single, simple essence, and that all things pre-existed in the mind of God before they existed in reality.<sup>13</sup>
6. Augustine argued that God knows all things in a single and unchanging act of supra-temporal and supra-spatial cognition. He held that all things were present to God in an eternal now, and that divine knowledge did not lead to multiplicity in God's essence as it was identical to it.<sup>14</sup>
7. Boethius built on Augustine's work and argued that since God knows changing particulars through an eternal now [*nunc stans*], God may

- know particulars without that introducing any temporal succession or complexity.<sup>15</sup>
8. Nicholas of Cusa held that God's knowledge transcended the limitations of discursive reasoning, and that knowledge of universals and particulars are indistinguishable in God. The infinite simplicity of God, argued Nicholas, encompasses all complexity.<sup>16</sup>

Dawkins did not properly respond to any of these arguments, nor did he properly address any other serious arguments for God, nor did he support his own position with any evidence or convincing logic. He just spouted his belief and asked the reader to support him—to those who wish to be atheists, that is all they needed to hear. To serious theologians, it was a laughable attempt. What's more surprising, however, is that this failed attempt represents a big step up for the New Atheists, who usually completely avoid theological arguments altogether, worrying that they will not be able to reason or rationalise their thoughts convincingly. William Lane Craig discussed this general point, saying:

"First, I thought it was commendable that Professor Dawkins treated the arguments for the existence of God in his book. All too often, the New Atheists simply ignored these, and Dawkins, to his credit, interacts with several of the principle theistic arguments. Having said that, however, I thought that his handling of them was just terribly superficial. He didn't show that he was aware of the best work on these arguments. In particular, his handling of the ontological argument was cringeworthy... it was embarrassing."<sup>17</sup>

#### C1: Therefore, God cannot explain the complexity of the world.

Dawkins' failure to prove his initial premises lead to a complete collapse of C1. His inductive reasoning fails, and, so, we can safely say that his arguments do not prove that the existence of God is insufficient as an explanation for the complexity of the world.

#### P4: Darwinian evolution provides a simple biological explanation for the biological complexity we see in the world.

Moving on, P4 goes further in demonstrating how poorly thought out Dawkins' arguments are. His argument is incomplete. Based on current evolutionary models, increasing biological complexity is appreciable through an evolutionary paradigm. However, not all biological complexity is explainable

through Darwinian evolution, and there are many unanswered questions. Questions over mind, sentience, the first phases of life, and properties of biological systems remain unanswered. A knee jerk New Atheist response is often to reject the existence of all of this, considering it all illusory, but doing so is not only entirely unfounded, it is extremely counterintuitive.

Further, Dawkins is trying to suggest two key points in this premise. The first is that biological complexity is aimless and purposeless, and the second is that this somehow suggests the absence of a Creator. He has argued at length for both of these points throughout his works, but he has never proven either of them. Simply put, it could well be the case that a Creator has initiated and/or guided and/or overseen these evolutionary processes. It could also be that the Creator made exceptions—such as in the case of humans—in those instances he saw fit, putting those creatures in the natural order of things but imbuing them with a higher spiritual purpose. This is not the place to argue for or against any such scenario, but I mention it to show just how little explanatory power P4 has, and just how weak it is as a claim. If all someone wishes to say by it is that there is some logical and internally coherent basis to believe that natural selection leads to increasingly complex appearances, then that is not entirely problematic. If someone wishes to say something more, then problems arise.

To many theists, evolution is a process that, itself, speaks of a Designer. It is a process among the processes of the world, and, thus, a creation among the creations of the world. To think that somehow identifying a modality, a *modus operandi*, answers a question of why—or even fully answers a question of how, when one considers the many unknowns and assumptions all humans must constantly make—is to be philosophically naïve.

The following couple of chapters will expand on evolution and theology and evolution and morality in some depth. As this concept is so central to Dawkins' worldview, it deserves more intense scrutiny in a book that aims to assess his worldviews.

**P5:** Whilst physics currently lacks an explanation for the physical complexity we see in the world, we can be hopeful that one will arise soon.

When you come across a premise like P5, you can, hopefully, appreciate why Dawkins' poor reasoning ability is infuriating to so many theists and logicians. This premise is nothing but wishful thinking, and it is demonstrative of a major category error. In a simple form, the claim is that 'because A helps explain B, A' probably will help explain C. There is no reason why physics must be like biology or is even likely to be like biology. That has not

been the case between physics and biology before—why on earth would Darwinism be an exception?

Further, as we mentioned briefly above, and will expand on in the following couple of chapters, Neo-Darwinism does not adequately answer any of the fundamental questions theologians pose. There is a great misconception that New Atheists seem to have, and now may be a good time to address it. Each time a how-ness is understood, the New Atheists feel that theism has somehow been undermined. They believe in a ‘God of the gaps’ hypothesis, arguing that theists explain unknowns using God, and then when the unknown becomes known, the theists move on to another unknown. This thinking arises from a misunderstanding of the theistic paradigm.

Believers in God attribute to God not only the power to enact or permit the unknowns, the gaps—they attribute to God all power. Just because I know that I walk with my feet, does not mean I now believe that God has no agency in this regard, and that God is not in control of every instance of the entire process. Understanding, in more detail, the biomechanics of my walking will do nothing to change that. Similarly, appreciating natural selection, gravity, and all other natural forces or phenomena will not change a theist’s belief that God is in ultimate control of the universe. There is no ‘gotcha moment’, except in the mind of the ideologically driven New Atheist.

And this is not a retreat from a classical understanding of God due to modern scientific advancements—it has always been the belief of theists. Whilst believers and non-believers alike may marvel at the unknowns and reflect more over them as signs of our limited understanding and power, I have never come across an educated theist, from modern or classical times, who believed that God controlled the gaps and creatures controlled the rest. Because the New Atheists’ misunderstanding is so prevalent among them, below are some quotes by the most famous thinkers from the Muslim and Christian intellectual traditions to illustrate how incorrect this ‘God of the gaps’ theory is:

- Al-Ghazālī: “The connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be an effect is not necessary, according to us.”<sup>10</sup>
- John Calvin: “No pious man, therefore, will make the sun either the necessary or principal cause of those things which existed before the creation of the sun, but only the instrument which God employs, because he so pleases; though he can lay it aside, and act equally well by himself”<sup>17</sup>

- Thomas Aquinas: “Again it is to be observed that where there are several agents in order, the second always acts in virtue of the first; for the first agent moves the second to act. And thus all agents act in virtue of God Himself: and therefore He is the cause of action in every agent.”<sup>13</sup>

Not only did these thinkers believe that identifying proximal causes did not weaken our theology, they found these causes and mechanisms to be strengtheners of faith. They marvelled at what they did not comprehend and also at what they did comprehend. Everything, in its own way, was appreciated to be from the creation of God. However, they appreciated that these causes and superficial explanations did not answer the deeper questions. Thus, no advancement in physics or biology does away with a belief in God. Many intellectual atheists and agnostics understand this point very clearly. It is only the ideologically driven who try to make this argument against theists.

**P6: The incomplete naturalistic explanations we have in physics mean that naturalism appears to be a less improbable explanation than God.**

Dawkins is arguing, here, that even though he does not have the answers behind the big questions in physics, he has partial answers, and so he can be hopeful that soon he will have all of the answers. Or if not, then at least these partial answers go some way to proving he is right. Wow.

Much of the response to P5 applies to P6, also, but the emphasis in P6 is different. The big question here is: by answering the small questions and gaining an increasingly granular understanding of the world, are we answering the ultimate questions? No, we are not. Nothing we have learned in either biology or physics has answered the ultimate questions in metaphysics. Those questions are in an entirely different category, and this category is dealt with by metaphysicians.

Dawkins claims that identifying naturalistic causes for natural phenomena somehow does away with belief in God and an appreciation of God’s oversight of the world. We explained why this is incorrect in the response to P5, but what I wish to add here is a clear and unequivocal statement: no amount of explanations and no degree of granularity in the natural sciences will be able to disprove God. Very simply, any law that scientists discover will be seen by theists to be subservient to God’s commands. Finding a million new theories and describing things in a million new ways will not change that.

Oddly, despite how clear and obvious that fact is, the New Atheists seem to rely on ‘discoveries’ and ‘science’ to disprove God. It seems silly to the neutral and to the faithful, but it is a coping measure for them, for they have decided that metaphysics is non-existent and then realised they cannot argue against God without delving into metaphysics, and then they put forward some feeble attempts to show their followers they have engaged the ‘enemy’. It is frankly dishonest and bizarre, and it speaks of an amoral and unscrupulous atheistic worldview.

The underlying concern of New Atheists is ideological, and so they accept wishy washy arguments so long as these arguments forward their worldview. It seems to me that most New Atheist objections to religion are based not on actual rigorous logic but on moral positions, imperialist tendencies, intolerance, and so on. Why else would they spew and parrot such poor arguments? The academia seems to be a façade for many of these authors.

**C<sub>2</sub>: Therefore, naturalistic explanations are more probable than the existence of God.**

**C<sub>3</sub>: Therefore, it is unlikely that there is a god.**

C<sub>2</sub> and C<sub>3</sub> fall completely flat as conclusions, because the premises they were built on are untrue, as has been shown. However, this makes for an interesting segue into a discussion on Dawkins and philosophy/metaphysics/theology. Him engaging in these fields whilst using ‘science’ to do so is a clear counterargument against his claim that these fields are illusory and non-existent. His engaging in the field and failing to comprehend simple concepts shows his amateurishness therein.

As for his central argument, it is flawed in its premises, its conclusions, and even in the link between them. Had the premises been true, the conclusion would not follow. It is both weak and uncogent as an inductive argument. To those untrained in formal logic and metaphysics, such arguments may prove enticing, especially when an individual wishes for something to be true. The New Atheist lives by no rules other than his own. Morality fluctuates, vices can become virtues, his self is empowered, worshipped even, and so the lower self is pulled towards it. However, an honest and true reading of Dawkins’ central argument shows that it is incredibly flawed and a baseless argument to build a worldview upon.

Furthermore, while Dawkins argues that Darwinism poses a challenge to the existence of God, he must exercise caution in presenting this viewpoint. As mentioned earlier no scientific theory is infallible; the philosophy

and history of science illustrate that even well-established theories can be revised or entirely replaced. This uncertainty is closely linked to a well-known philosophical issue known as the problem of induction, a problem whose implications Dawkins does not really understand.

During Dawkins' interview with Oxford philosopher Stephen Law, an audience member raised a pertinent question about how the scientific method can be justified. In response, Dawkins cited induction, asserting that:

“It works, it works um, planes fly, cars drive, computers compute, um if you base medicine on science you cure people, if you base the design of planes on science they fly, um if you design rockets on science they reach the moon. It works bitches.”<sup>18</sup>

On this the audience erupted in laughter and clapping. Law's response was to politely say “It's an inductive argument.” whilst Dawkins was answering the question. He was pointing to the obvious fact that you can not use induction to answer the problem of induction, that is circular reasoning. Dawkins was misunderstanding the very foundation of this philosophical dilemma. Yet this was lost on the audience who cheered Dawkins' supposed knock down answer. I asked Law about that famous interaction:

“That's a really funny clip online, and I don't think he realized you said that because he was engaging with the audience. But, you know, it's those sorts of times when I see, well, clearly there is a need for a philosopher to sit with a scientist because you're trying to justify induction using induction.”

Law: “He was, unfortunately, trying to use induction to justify induction, yeah. Um, there's a famous philosophical puzzle about how we justify our belief in the unobserved, called the problem of induction. It's associated with the philosopher David Hume, and it's a really horribly difficult problem. It's tempting to say, “Oh, well, yeah, we can trust observation. We can trust science, in particular, because we know that science works. You know, we've got men on the moon, and we've created electricity, and all sorts of things. I mean, it does have a fantastic track record.” But that is inductive reasoning. So, if you use inductive reasoning to justify inductive reasoning, it's a bit like trusting a secondhand car salesman because he says he's trustworthy. I mean, there's just no justification at all. And, um, but he got a nice joke out of it, which was fair enough. I didn't object. I didn't mind. But we'd kind of—it was a Breaking Bad reference, wasn't it? “Science works bitches.” That was what he was referring to.”

I said: “Yeah, Breaking Bad, yeah.”

Law: “Which was good. But, um, yeah, but he hadn’t actually really engaged with the philosophical puzzle at all.”

This interaction highlights a startling reality, Dawkins is one of the most well recognised science communicators in the world, yet he does not understand the basic problem of induction, this is an elementary issue in the philosophy of science and we should expect him to know it. What is even more surprising is how his simplistic incoherent answer can win over an audience so easily.

Another Oxford colleague who pointed out Dawkins’s mistaken philosophical reasoning is Daniel Came .Came points out that:

“Dawkins maintains that we’re not justified in inferring a designer as the best explanation of the appearance of design in the universe because then a new problem surfaces: who designed the designer? This argument is as old as the hills and, as any reasonably competent first-year undergraduate could point out, is patently invalid. For an explanation to be successful, we do not need an explanation of the explanation. One might as well say that evolution by natural selection explains nothing because it does nothing to explain why there were living organisms on Earth in the first place, or that the Big Bang fails to explain the cosmic background radiation because the Big Bang is itself inexplicable.”<sup>19</sup>

Came’s statement highlights an important point: the belief that an explanation must account for its own origins is a flawed assumption. By arguing that the designer hypothesis fails due to the emergence of the question about the designer’s origins, Dawkins adds an unnecessary layer of complexity to the discussion. Came stresses that effective explanations do not require an additional justification. Just as the theory of evolution by natural selection offers a solid framework for understanding the diversity of life without needing to explain how life initially arose, the designer hypothesis can adequately explain the complexity and order observed in the universe without needing to delve into the origins of the designer.

Moreover, taking Dawkins’s objection seriously could undermine the foundations of both science and philosophy. This point was made by Tzortzis to Dawkins during their interaction in Dublin in 2011, and it is the same point that McGrath and Lennox made to Dawkins<sup>20</sup>. On all these occasions, Dawkins either did not understand how it undermined his point or ignored the obvious point being made.

Even if Dawkins finds these philosophical issues challenging to understand, he should acknowledge that scientific theories, including the selfish gene concept, are subject to revision and critique. Why, then, does he rely on such arguments for atheism when these theories are open to being discarded? Indeed, some biologists have argued that Neo-Darwinism is no longer a tenable explanation of evolutionary processes. In a previous work, I explored Denis Noble's critique of Neo-Darwinism, particularly targeting Dawkins, in a book titled *The Death of Neo-Darwinism*<sup>21</sup>. Thus, leveraging Neo-Darwinism as a basis for arguments against God is illogical, as it is a theory that can be replaced.

If Dawkins struggles to understand basic philosophical issues that is alarming for a supposed public intellectual, but what is worse is that he doesn't understand important discussions within his own area either.

For example, many biologists including the well known biologist E.O. Wilson's views on evolution directly challenge the selfish gene theory that Dawkins promotes. After Dawkins had a public disagreement with Wilson on the status of the selfish gene theory a BBC reporter asked Wilson about their altercation:

“I know you have had quite a big history with Richard Dawkins and a different view of the natural selection process. Where are we on that now in your view?”

Wilson replied “There is no dispute between me and Richard Dawkins and never has been. Because he’s a journalist and journalists are people who report what the scientists have found and the arguments I’ve had have actually been with scientists doing research.”<sup>22</sup>

Wilson is not alone in his negative impression of Dawkins, surprisingly a study in the UK indicated that scientists believe he misrepresents science and scientists<sup>23</sup>. Although Dawkins positions himself as a defender of Darwinian principles, he has been criticized for misrepresenting the legacy of Darwin in his book *The Selfish Gene*. Professor Fern Elsdon-Baker, an expert in evolutionary history, dedicated a book to this topic, amusingly titled *The Selfish Genius: How Richard Dawkins Rewrote Darwin’s Legacy*<sup>24</sup>. In it, she contends that Dawkins has effectively hijacked Darwin’s ideas for his own selfish objectives, promoting a distorted interpretation of contemporary evolutionary science.

The crux of all this discussion is that Dawkins should refrain from using a scientific theory to underpin his arguments for atheism, particularly given that scientific theories are subject to change and reevaluation. A sensible biologist would admit that evolutionary theory, Darwinian or otherwise does not lead to atheism.



## CHAPTER 4

# On Evolution and God

A false narrative constantly peddled by Dawkins and his followers is that the theory of evolution disproves God. This is a lie, and whilst his followers may be ignorantly believing it, Dawkins knows that it is a lie. Many critics of Dawkins avoid directly stating this about him out of a desire to maintain cordiality, but the New Atheists' own obscenities have gone so far as to justify wars against Muslim populations due to their hatred for religion, as we have discussed in the opening chapter of this book. Therefore, it is entirely fair that we call out their deceit for what it is and prove as much.

Dawkins argues that belief in evolution undermines the belief in God, whilst knowing that this is not the case. He understands that many people misunderstand the relationship between evolution and God. He then proceeds to use this misunderstanding to undermine religion. This is the behaviour of a charlatan.

One may argue that Dawkins simply believes what he says, and, so, he is mistaken but not a liar. Or they may argue that he has misunderstood what he is saying, so he is ignorant but not a liar. In either case, they would be wrong. Dawkins is well aware of his deceit. If all he did was to say that evolution undermined the design argument, he would be wrong but not fraudulent. If all he did was say that a belief in the evolution of man undermines the creation story in Genesis, he would also not be fraudulent. However, when he argues, as he does, that somehow evolution undermines the belief in God, then he would be both wrong and clearly fraudulent.

In his book, *The God Delusion*, Dawkins did not reveal his hand and make clear his deceit. Thus, critics of the book have only really accused him of presenting weak arguments, engaging in sophistry, and not understanding philosophy well. However, the reason I go further and accuse him of clear deceit is due to what I have heard from him myself in an interview

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that most of his fans and critics are unaware of. In this interview, Dawkins clearly admits to exploiting the misunderstanding of religious laity regarding evolution and theology, using it to entice people away from religion and towards atheism. The interview was hosted by Dawkins' fellow New Atheist Lawrence Krauss, and Dawkins had the following to say:

"You don't have to be an atheist to believe in evolution. Now, if your aim is to propagandise in favour of evolution, then that is the best deduction technique, but if your aim is to kill religion—as mine is—then, since evolution is manifestly true, then, if there are people out there who really believe that if you are an evolutionist you've got to be an atheist, then all I've got to do is persuade them of evolution—which should be comparatively easy since the evidence is overwhelming—then I'll turn them all into atheists."<sup>1</sup>

This is a glaring admission and it summarises Dawkins' work. Dawkins is willing to use powerful writing, deceitful presentations of ideas, and however much hand waving it takes to try to harm religion, as he sees it. His own religion of New Atheism is one that has as its chief aim the harm and downfall of other religions. After realising this would not be achieved through honest and nuanced dialogue, he resorted to what he mentioned above: exploiting people's ignorance to draw them away from religion.

There are many well-informed atheists who have honest, open, and frank discussions about religions and philosophy. We have even quoted some of them earlier in this book. Many of them have lasting intellectual legacies that are still impactful today. Dawkins is unlike them and is more akin to a snake oil salesman—he tries to guide people in a certain direction, whatever the cost of doing so may be to his integrity, and then, only later on do some people realise they have been fed falsehood, whilst others fall prey to the trap and die upon it.

This link between atheism and evolutionary theorists is a cultural one, not a logical one. There are some biologists who try to hide or obfuscate this, such as Paul Myers and Coyne, and there are many others who are honest and lucid over the issue, acknowledging in public what Dawkins let slip in that interview. I had the great pleasure of discussing the topic *Does Evolution Undermine God?* with Jeremy Pritchard, a professor of biology from Birmingham University. In his opening remarks, Pritchard—being an atheist himself—said, "Does evolution undermine God? In my philosophy, no, it doesn't, so we can all go home."<sup>2</sup> The audience laughed, and why shouldn't they? It really is that simple.

Throughout the ensuing hour, Pritchard and I discussed the science of evolution and philosophy more broadly, but his initial statement encapsulates the essence of our discussion. It was honest, open, and without hindrance, and it goes to show that the convolution of evolution and atheism has come about not due to any logical compulsion, but due to people like Dawkins being deceitful. In Dawkins' own words, "You don't have to be an atheist to believe in evolution," but it becomes polemically useful to make it seem as though you do "if your aim is to kill religion—as mine is."

The more nuanced and sensible voices like Jeremy Pritchard's do exist, but they are often drowned out by the more shouty and militant voices like those of Dawkins, Myers, and Coyne. This is not unique to biology—there are extremists who gain visibility in all walks of life, including, obviously, in religion. Darwin himself, though no friend of religion, was nuanced and multifaceted in his views. Since he is the claimed forbear of Dawkins—who often misuses and misrepresents him for polemical purposes—it is worth spending some time going through Darwin's own approach, before we return to a philosophical breakdown of evolution and God.

Darwin's views are neither evidence for or against theism. What they are is a historical account of a complex and influential figure. Darwin was a biologist, not a philosopher, and he was not even aware of many of the religious thinkers out there in the world, let alone their responses to his discoveries. Darwin's views are mentioned here to defend against their misuse—as done repeatedly by the New Atheists—and to show how even to its most well known proponent, evolutionary theory and atheism were far from synonymous.

Born on 12 February 1809, Darwin hailed from a conventional Christian background. His father, Robert Darwin, was a prosperous physician, and his mother, Susannah, came from a Unitarian Christian background. This Unitarianism is significant, as it was incredibly heterodox for the time, and so it meant that Darwin was exposed to people who were sceptical towards tradition from an early age. His maternal grandfather—also a Unitarian—was perhaps the first person in Darwin's life who introduced sceptical thought to him.

Darwin's early schooling took place in a parish church and a Unitarian chapel. He was, no doubt, exposed to both the church's teachings and ideas that challenged orthodoxy. He then went on to study at Edinburgh University, where he pursued medicine as a discipline, whilst remaining somewhat indifferent to religious matters. This much was noted in his letters to his family members who expressed concerns that he was not developing well spiritually.

Like some Christians from his time and since, it seemed that Darwin began to realise that there was some content he came across in his scripture that clashed with developments in the natural sciences. This was most notable to him on his voyage on the HMS Beagle in 1831-1836. Such a clash between the natural sciences and the Bible in my opinion is due to the fact that those who altered the biblical text were keen to impose their understanding of the world onto others, and these understandings were plagued with claims that have now been proven wrong. Whatever the reasons, Darwin began to harbour doubts.

Exacerbating these doubts were the death of Darwin's daughter, as well as the plurality of religion Darwin witnessed on his travels. The death of his daughter made him question the benevolence of God, and the different religions he saw made him question how a quite monolithic and ethnically narrow religion like Christianity (at least in his time) could be the ultimate answer for all peoples. It was around this time that he began to write his book, *The Origin of Species*. In this book, he laid out the basics of his theory of evolution and the interrelatedness of creatures. He was conflicted on a personal level, and his religious commitment seems to have fluctuated intensely, but he never once became an actual atheist. Historian Nick Spencer wrote:

“Darwin was thus an atheist with regard to the Christian God, but he was never an atheist in the full sense of the word. He remained a ‘theist’ throughout the 1850s and ’60s; although the God he believed in was now the God of first causes and, properly speaking, he was more deist than theist during this period.”<sup>3</sup>

Notably, this rejection of atheism stayed with Darwin until the end of his life. In the last years of his life, he wrote, “In my most extreme fluctuations, I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God.”<sup>3</sup>

A turning point in Darwin's intellectual journey came from his friend Charles Kingsley, a prominent author and theologian who espoused belief in God. After reading *On the Origin of Species*, Kingsley wrote to Darwin, expressing his support for the idea that God could create organisms through the mechanism of evolution. He conveyed that believing in a God who created primal forms capable of self-development was as noble a conception as believing in a God who made constant interventions. Darwin was so taken with Kingsley's words that he included portions of the letter in the second edition of *On the Origin of Species*. Kingsley wrote:

“I have gradually learnt to see that it is just as noble a conception of Deity, to believe that he created primal forms capable of self-development...as to believe that He required a fresh act of intervention to supply the lacunas (or ‘gaps’) which he himself had made.”<sup>3</sup>

Along with Kingsley was Asa Grey, a distinguished American botanist and ardent supporter of Darwin’s work. Grey believed that evolution and theism were entirely compatible, arguing that evolution could be just a means among the many means that God utilises in this world of proximal causes. Of course, there could also be exceptions, as God was able to do as he wished, but these exceptions did not need to break the general principle. Darwin seemingly supported Grey in this belief of his, writing in his correspondence:

“It seems to me absurd to doubt that a man may be an ardent theist and an evolutionist. You are right about Kingsley. Asa Grey, the eminent botanist, is another case in point. What my own views may be is a question of no consequence to anyone except myself.”<sup>3</sup>

Elsewhere, and after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin wrote:

“[Reason tells me of the] extreme difficulty or rather impossibility of conceiving this immense and wonderful universe, including man with his capability of looking far backwards and far into futurity, as the result of blind chance or necessity. When thus reflecting I feel compelled to look to a First Cause having an intelligent mind in some degree analogous to that of man; and I deserve to be called a Theist.”<sup>3</sup>

However, his constant mental fluctuations meant that he later moved more towards agnosticism than theism. Perhaps most telling are his statements to his friend Henry Acland, “My theology is a simple muddle,”<sup>3</sup> and to his friend Asa Grey, “I feel most deeply that the whole subject is too profound for the human intellect. A dog might as well speculate on the mind of Newton. Let each man hope and believe what he can.”<sup>3</sup>

Spencer, whom we must credit for amalgamating a lot of the above biographical information on Dawkins, poses an important question, “How is it, then, that this gentle, respectful, humane agnostic has become the patron saint of modern, aggressive atheism?”<sup>3</sup> The answer is that the New Atheists are not interested so much in logic, reasoning, and integrity as

they are in ideology and making their religion supreme. Recall the earlier quote of Dawkins in which he effectively admitted as much.

Francis Collins, one of the most influential and accomplished geneticists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, had a lengthy discussion with Dawkins on some of the matters we have discussed above. Collins is an American physician and geneticist renowned for his pivotal role in the Human Genome Project, which mapped the entire human genome. He served as director of the National Institutes of Health from 2009 to 2021, and is widely recognised for his frequent contributions to biomedical research. Collins left atheism to become a Christian, and speaks at length of his belief that a belief in God can coexist with a belief in evolution. The conversation between Collins and Dawkins was lengthy, but a telling moment in their exchange is as follows:

Dawkins: “It is a betrayal of everything that Darwinism—it seems to me—stands for, to smuggle in a creator once you got rid of him... then you just bring him back because it feels good to bring him back.”

Collins: “It’s a lot more than ‘feels good.’ I think it can be articulated as a rational choice. But, basically, Richard, I am arguing not that the evolutionary process is incapable of generating complexity—I think it totally is—you and I are in the same place here.”

Dawkins: “Absolutely. There is no doubt about that.”

Collins: “But you said that, ‘Well, it’s just happened because of the laws of physics.’ I want to take this back to that step. Where did those come from?”<sup>4</sup>

Dawkins refers to a belief in a creator as being a betrayal of Darwinism, but that seems completely at odds with the historical Darwin, the same man who wrote towards the end of his life, “In my most extreme fluctuations, I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is not really Darwinism that a belief in God betrays; it is New Atheism that is challenged by a belief in God. They wish to hijack Darwin because, as Dawkins said very openly, he wishes to “kill religion,” and so he wishes for people to be swayed by an ideological sleight of hand.<sup>1</sup>

Collins comments lead us to a very important question: is evolution not an example of design itself, one that rests on even higher design principles and exquisite fine tuning? There is no escaping this reality. Describing the processes of design in increasing detail does not do away with the design itself. Professor Erkki Kojonen, Finnish theologian and philosopher, asks us to consider this issue from another perspective, writing:

“The question that I want to ask is quite fundamental: why should Darwinian evolutionary biology show that design beliefs are wrong in the case of biology? Let us accept that no references to design are required in the discipline of biology in order to explain teleological order. But what if Darwinian evolution itself depends on design, in that it depends on the wider teleology built into the universe? In this case it would not be accurate to say that evolution produces teleology completely without design. Rather, evolutionary mechanisms bring forth the potential that is built into the creation. Following the analogy of the VCR factory, just as the designedness of a factory is not irrelevant to explaining the products, the designedness of the universe is not irrelevant to the production of organisms. So Darwinian evolution itself cannot prove that biology does not require design, and so Dawkins’ argument cannot get started. To prove his premises, Dawkins would first have to tackle cosmological arguments, and to show that the laws of nature do not require a designer. Putting biology first is a philosophical decision. Without further arguments, one might just as well put cosmology, philosophy, theology or everyday experience first.”<sup>5</sup>

This highlights an extremely important point—and a recurring error of Dawkins—describing things in increasing detail does not solve any of the larger questions. Knowing how a grandfather clock works does not decrease the clock’s beauty, nor does it explain the hand that made it in any ultimate way. No regress can be solved in this way. Evolution does not do away with teleology—the design argument is wholly intact—nor does it do away with a belief in God. We know as much. Dawkins knows as much. And as much was made clear when he slipped and revealed too much of his agenda-driven approach, saying, “You don’t have to be an atheist to believe in evolution.”<sup>1</sup>

The upshot of this chapter is that evolutionary theory—and, by extension, any theory—does not lead to atheism. While it is true that scientists subscribe to methodological naturalism—the idea that explanations should only rely on natural causes without reference to God or any other non-physical entities—this does not lead to the conclusion that philosophical naturalism (the idea that all reality consists only of natural elements; i.e., there is no God) is true. Pigliucci highlights this point “The fallacy lies in the fact that most people – including, alas, prominent science popularisers such as Richard Dawkins – do not make the subtle but crucial distinction between methodological and philosophical naturalism.”<sup>6</sup>



## CHAPTER 5

# On Atheism and Morality

With atheism, there is no objective morality. There is no meaning, no goodness, no evil, no purpose. All of this is an ‘illusion’, according to the honest atheist, just like God is an ‘illusion’ to them. To an atheist, morality is nothing more than a psychosocial construct that provides a survival advantage. We think something is ‘good’ just because it confers a survival advantage to us; we think a survival advantage is ‘good’ just because we have been passively, though selectively, bred to procreate into oblivion. Anything that seems good may seem horrible from another paradigm, and our current paradigms have no need to conform to reality—all they need to do is provide a survival advantage. Murder, rape, torture, and so on are only seen as bad because we are tricked into thinking they are bad by our genes which wish to propagate their DNA. This is Dawkins’ world. This is the world of all New Atheists. There are no exceptions.

Traditionally, good and evil have always been seen as absolutes. Societies have invariably believed in a higher power and in an ultimate reality beyond the material one we control, and every society has had a concept of inherent good and inherent evil—moral absolutes. A murderer was not considered evil because that’s what society wants them to be seen as, but because they were considered to have committed genuine evil. Atheists are the exception.

The father of modern liberalism, John Locke, noted this moral ambivalence of atheists. He understood that this meant that they were the only part of society who do not hold themselves to moral absolutes. If murder and rape suddenly became useful to them, they would justify it as easily as they justify acts of kindness. They have a utilitarian understanding of morality. Thus, in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke wrote:

“Lastly, those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all; besides also, those that by their atheism undermine and destroy all religion, can have no pretence of religion whereupon to challenge the privilege of a toleration.”<sup>1</sup>

This fact makes the New Atheists very, very uncomfortable. At times, Dawkins admits that he is a moral relativist. For example, in his book, *River Out of Eden*, he writes, “The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”<sup>2</sup> He wrote as much because he was arguing against God and thought that such a framing would be useful. However, when he is questioned on his moral relativity, Dawkins often replies by attacking the morals he disagrees with from among the world religions.<sup>3</sup> To even an undergraduate philosopher or logician, this irony is intolerable. He is defending moral subjectivity by giving his subjective moral decision on other religions! It genuinely leaves one dumbfounded to see his followers lap up these responses.

There are times when Dawkins lets this defensive guard down and his true beliefs are made clear. During an interview with the well-known podcaster Justin Brierley, Dawkins admitted that our belief in the wrongness of rape was as arbitrary as the fact that humans evolved with five fingers instead of six.<sup>4</sup> When John Lennox debated Richard Dawkins, he managed to corner the latter into admitting to some very uncomfortable truths. Lennox argued:

“That seems to imply that good and evil do not exist. If that’s the case, where do you derive your moral criteria from? If a rock falls off a mountain and kills you, it wouldn’t make sense to label the rock as evil; it simply exists. When Pol Pot decides to eliminate a million intellectuals, or when the 9/11 terrorists fly planes into the Twin Towers, how can their actions be deemed evil if they are merely acting according to their DNA? This presents a grim worldview: a reality without morality.”<sup>5</sup>

Dawkins replied:

“My rhetoric about blind physical forces and indifference may indeed portray a hideous world, but acknowledging that does not negate its truth. That’s the key point I want to emphasise. You

can talk endlessly about how nice it would be if the world were friendly and not so grim. However, that does not inform us about the reality of the situation. If the world is, indeed, a hideous place, it offers us something to rise above, and we clearly do rise above it. You questioned how we can rebel as if there's a contradiction, but there's no contradiction in transcending Darwinian imperatives. We defy these imperatives every time we use contraception. We enjoy sex, which is a pleasure shaped by Darwinism, but we are separating that pleasure from reproduction. By using sex for enjoyment without the intent to reproduce, we are resisting the dictates of our selfish genes, and we can effectively rebel against the blind forces that brought us here. We understand the harsh realities of natural selection, a process that, while ugly, results in beautiful outcomes. As humans, we can rise above it.”<sup>5</sup>

This is a huge contradiction. Dawkins believes and writes emphatically about humans being nothing but the material products of an evolutionary process. His writings and speeches render free will to being nothing but an illusion. Then, when pressed on the issue, he claims that we can rebel against our biology. Is he suddenly saying that we do have free will? That would undermine so much of his anti-metaphysical, anti-theistic rhetoric. It completely shreds his materialistic arguments to bits.

During an interview with comedian Ricky Gervais, Dawkins and Gervais both candidly conceded that free will was an illusion, yet they said this was “not even worth worrying about” as they “feel that [they] make their own choices” and “you’ve still got to lock someone up if they go around murdering people.”<sup>6</sup> Brent White responds to this irony, writing, “... as philosophical materialists, they’re committed to a worldview that says nothing exists beyond this material world... The problem is that it also rules out another immaterial thing that every human being, whether theist or atheist, experiences all the time: an independent mind.”<sup>6</sup>

If that is the case, and we truly have no minds, no consciousness independent of physical compulsions beyond our control, then how on earth do Gervais and Dawkins feel that this does not strip people of individual responsibility? Gervais’ argument that we still have to lock people up is especially absurd. Commenting on this, White writes:

“Is he blind to the irony of that statement? His words are truer than he knows: If we have no free will, then, by all means, you’ve “got to lock someone up.” I mean, you’ve got to—because the people who are going around locking others up also have no choice!

They're only doing what blind, unguided physical processes are compelling them to do. And all the while, their brains are lying to them, making them believe that they're choosing to do so.

Yet somehow Dawkins and Gervais have no problem with this? I say that they are “of all men most to be pitied.”

After all, in the very next breath they complain about Christians who insist on a worldview that fails to see the world as they do. But why complain? By their own reasoning, Dawkins and Gervais aren't atheists because they've thought it through, and they've chosen the worldview that makes the most sense of the world; they're atheists because—again—blind, unguided physical processes have made them this way.<sup>6</sup>

One can quickly see how absurd and out-of-touch Dawkins' fallacious way of thinking becomes if you follow it to its logical conclusions. William Lane Craig lays out another very interesting outcome of this New Atheist paradox.<sup>7</sup> The moral argument for God is based on two premises, and Dawkins affirms both—in practice, at least, even if he occasionally claims otherwise.

- P1: Objective morality does not exist in the absence of God.
- P2: There are clearly, intuitable, objective morals in the world.
- C1: There is a God.

We quoted Dawkins, above, as having said, “... there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, nor evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”<sup>2</sup> So he clearly agrees with P1 (i.e. that, without God, there can be no objective morality). P2 is where it gets interesting. William Lane Craig comments:

“... he actually affirms [in his book] both of these premises... At the same time, however, it's very evident that Richard Dawkins is a die-hard, stubborn moralist. His book is filled with moral judgements. For example, he condemns unequivocally the Incan practice of human sacrifice. He condemns the religious indoctrination of children. He condemns the persecution, harassment of homosexuals. He condemns prizing cultural diversity over the interests of Amish children. He even gives his own amended 10 commandments in the book for guiding moral behaviour. So, it's very clear that Richard Dawkins is a moral realist. He believes in the reality and the objectivity of moral values. The problem is, in conjunction with that first premise, that implies that God exists. And Dawkins doesn't seem to connect the dots.”<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned before, Dawkins is not a great philosopher, nor is he a particularly honest one. Moral relativity means moral relativity. Sure, you can tell me all about how you think morals spontaneously arose through evolution, but if you are an atheist, then those morals are entirely made up and utilitarian. They have no objective weight, and it is up to people to decide what to choose as being moral or immoral, even if that decision is spurred on by biological impulses. Thus, were you to decide that murder is good and I to decide that it is bad, you would have no moral superiority over me to dictate my morals, and you would have no reason—other than for the ‘selfish’ reasons Dawkins loves to talk about—to change your own mind.

In this nihilistic, fatalistic world so lacking in moral truths and axiomatic dogma, we find a strikingly characteristic over-zealous evangelism and coercion. We find it most jarringly apparent in the religions of New Atheism and modern liberalism. This paradox lies at the core of all of their value judgments. Never let them forget it—they are those to whom murder and charity are inherently equal. Once you understand this, no further moral disputation should ever be had with them. For one who has no understanding of good and evil other than custom has nothing fruitful to add to the discussion. All emotional arguments are to be ignored if they are based on illogical foundations.

This should be the approach when dealing with New Atheists. Whenever they moralise, one should simply ask of the origins of their morality and whether there is any objective basis to what they are saying. The answer will invariably be some whimpering followed by stories about morals being societally decided and sociobiologically driven—all of this is another way to say that their morals are all relative. Once that is established, ask them if it would be possible for their biology or society to be different. After all, the biology of many animals is very different to ours, and some animals even kill their young for food or harm other animals for fun, and there have been many different societies throughout history practicing incredibly vulgar practices. In response to the question, New Atheists are forced to say “Yes,” if they wish to remain logically consistent. They are forced to accept that biologies vary and that societies vary, and that it would be incredibly odd for us to just have chanced our way into a perfect biology and a perfect society in which we are capable of deciding between good and evil. Therefore, there would be no reason to give preference to the morality of the New Atheists over the morality of anyone or anything else. In fact, one could just quote Dawkins and say “there is... no evil, no good.”<sup>2</sup>

Many atheists throughout history and in modern times have understood the consequences of their worldview. For example, Alex Rosenberg—biologist, atheist, naturalist, and professor of philosophy—wrote:

“Is natural selection so smart that it was able to filter out all the incorrect, false core moralities and end up with the only one that just happens to be true? Or is it the other way around: Natural selection filtered out all but one core morality, and winning the race is what made the last surviving core morality the right, correct, true one. Which is it? It can’t be either. The only way out of the puzzle is nihilism. Our core morality isn’t true, right, or correct, nor is any other. Nature just seduced us into thinking it’s right.”<sup>8</sup>

He is right to think that if one accepts atheism as a worldview, moral absolutism is not an option. This was the understanding of serious atheistic philosophers throughout history, and it is precisely because the New Atheists are ideologically-driven charlatans more so than actual philosophers that they try to slip and slide between moralising evangelists on the one hand and pure moral nihilism on the other.

Among the philosophers to speak so candidly of the consequences of atheism on morality was Nietzsche. He laments over this issue at length, and much of his later work involves him attempting to tackle the nihilism he reached. Due to his centrality to the work of so many later atheist philosophers, I will quote him at some length here:

“What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: the advent of nihilism. This history can be related even now; for necessity itself is at work here. This future speaks even now in a hundred signs, this destiny announces itself everywhere; for this music of the future all ears are cocked even now. For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach the end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect.

... The end of Christianity—at the hands of its own morality (which cannot be replaced), which turns against the Christian God (the sense of truthfulness, developed highly by Christianity, is nauseated by the falseness and mendaciousness of all Christian interpretations of the world and of history; rebound from “God is truth” to the fanatical faith “All is false”; Buddhism of action).

Scepticism regarding morality is what is decisive. The end of the moral interpretation of the world, which no longer has any sanction after it has tried to escape into some beyond, leads to nihilism. “Everything lacks meaning” (the untenability of one

interpretation of the world, upon which a tremendous amount of energy has been lavished, awakens the suspicion that all interpretations of the world are false). Buddhistic tendency, yearning for Nothing. (Indian Buddhism is not the culmination of a thoroughly moralistic development; its nihilism is therefore full of morality that is not overcome: existence as punishment, existence construed as error, error thus as a punishment--a moral valuation.) Philosophical attempts to overcome the “moral God” (Hegel, pantheism). Overcoming popular ideals: the sage; the saint; the poet. The antagonism of “true” and “beautiful” and “good”.

Against “meaninglessness” on the one hand, against moral value judgments on the other: to what extent has all science and philosophy so far been influenced by moral judgments? And won’t this net us the hostility of science? Or an antiscientific mentality? Critique of Spinozism. Residues of Christian value judgments are found everywhere in socialistic and positivistic systems. A critique of Christian morality is still lacking

The nihilistic consequences of contemporary natural science (together with its attempts to escape into some beyond). The industry of its pursuit eventually leads to self-disintegration, opposition, an antiscientific mentality. Since Copernicus man has been rolling from the center toward X.\*

The nihilistic consequences of the ways of thinking in politics and economics, where all “principles” are practically histrionic: the air of mediocrity, wretchedness, dishonesty, etc. Nationalism. Anarchism, etc. Punishment. The redeeming class and human being are lacking—the justifiers.

The nihilistic consequences of historiography and of the “practical historians,” i.e., the romantics. The position of art: its position in the modern world absolutely lacking in originality. Its decline into gloom. Goethe’s allegedly Olympian stance.”<sup>9</sup>

This grey sludge of nihilistic modernity is increasingly upon us now. Nietzsche understood what atheism led to better than the New Atheists of today. He lamented the loss of religion, though he was no friend of organised religion himself, and he recognised that without any firm grounding for objective reality, all that remained was whim and fancy. Impulses and desires become the ultimate controllers of such people, a fact which has long been understood by theists. In the Quran, we are asked:

“Hast thou seen him who maketh his desire his god?”<sup>10</sup>

Hume, an atheist whom we spoke of earlier, also recognised this fact about atheism—it leads to Pyrrhonism, which is a form of scepticism so extreme that it necessitates moral nihilism. In fact, it is a form of scepticism so extreme that it renders all thought meaningless. Recall Hume's statement to this effect:

“For here is the chief and most confounding objection to excessive scepticism, that no durable good can ever result from it; while it remains in its full force and vigour. We need only ask such a sceptic, What his meaning is? And what he proposes by all these curious researches? He is immediately at a loss, and knows not what to answer. A Copernican or Ptolemaic, who supports each his different system of astronomy, may hope to produce a conviction, which will remain constant and durable, with his audience. A Stoic or Epicurean displays principles, which may not only be durable, but which have an effect on conduct and behaviour. But a Pyrrhonian cannot expect that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind: Or it is had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge any thing, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence.”<sup>11</sup>

To Hume, the main reason to not descend into this nihilism was the apathy that results. He accepted that there was circularity to his reasoning and that his worldview cannot be proven from first principles. However, he thought that simply proceeding according to what is apparent, and as if we did live in a world of meaning and purpose, was most useful and made most sense. In an atheistic, naturalistic worldview, however, this desire for meaning and this rejection of an apathetic attitude are nothing more than the outcomes of biological compulsions, and, thus, they are no more justified than their opposites. Life and death are equal to the honest atheist—and why should they not be, when they consider life, mind, and meaning to be nothing but an illusion?

Dawkins would have us believe that all of our kindnesses, acts of self-sacrifice, and altruism are nothing more than self-serving, biologically driven acts of self-preservation. To Dawkins, there is no free will—everything is predetermined.<sup>12</sup> The fact that he definitely does not behave in that way, as he does not stop moralising and attacking the positions of others, is

incredibly telling. There is a reality to life—real altruism, real good, real love—that he wants to suppress and wants others to believe does not really exist except in a psychosocial paradigm that is ultimately predetermined.

‘Gaslighting’ is a modern word thrown around without much thought these days, but it is a term I quite like. It means to manipulate someone into questioning their own perception of reality. Dawkins can fairly be accused of attempting to gaslight readers into doubting their own intuitions and commitments to morality. Then, in a characteristically serpentine manner, he judges the moral compasses of others with his own modern worldview. One should ignore this deceit and not fall into his trap.

Even then, it does not matter whether Dawkins’ arguments about the origins of morality are true or not. They do not prove that atheism is correct; they only show him—and all those like him—to be moral relativists. No doubt, it is incredibly annoying that he argues both for complete purposelessness in the world and complete moral relativity, and then he moralises to no end and is willing to support the killing of other people over his own moral positions. The temptation is to take him at his word regarding his moral relativism and then engage him no further in dialogue—his relativism means that he sees no value in your life or mine, and that he sees no objective wrongness in murdering either one of us. However, it would be naïve to write a book about Dawkins without at least explaining his biological arguments in some detail, and so we shall do exactly that.

Dawkins argues that morality is nothing but an illusion, and that we, as organisms, behave in a seemingly moral way only because that has proven beneficial for our genes in the past, either directly or indirectly. Dawkins identifies four mechanisms of how this occurs:

1. kin selection (helping related organisms);
2. reciprocal altruism (helping other organisms in return for them helping you);
3. reputational altruism (helping other organisms to be known as a good reciprocator); and
4. display altruism (showing generosity to show dominance).

Dawkins claims that the basic unit of replication is not the organism, but the gene, and that our genes want to propagate as much as possible. They do so unthinkingly and without purpose. I have addressed how oversimplified this understanding is in a previous work titled *The Death of Neo-Darwinism*, and I encourage readers to review that work for a longer discussion on Dawkins’ ideas of gene-centrality and gene-primacy. For our present

purpose, we are more concerned with Dawkins' understanding of how morality arises from genes, and, so, we shall discuss each of the above four mechanisms in more detail.

Kin selection refers to organisms helping their genetic relatives, as this increases the survival rate of shared genes. In other words, you and your cousins share genes, and, so, by helping them survive, you help the genes you share with them survive. It was a theory first formalised by William Hamilton, who argued that organisms which do not display inclusive fitness traits are less likely to survive, and, therefore, eventually die out or become outnumbered by more socially supportive organisms.<sup>13</sup> According to Dawkins, we intuit this support as 'morality'. When a mother bird is protecting her offspring from a predator, she is, in fact, only protecting the propagation of her own genes. In this vein, naked mole rats, which are eusocial mammals, have been shown by William Hamilton—who was the first to formally theorise kin selection—to exhibit more protective behaviours towards their own offspring than towards other offspring within their communities.

Dawkins believes that kin altruism is sufficiently robust a system to favour selection and become widespread, saying, "A gene that programs individual organisms to favour their genetic kin is statistically likely to benefit copies of itself. Such a gene's frequency can increase in the gene pool to the point where kin altruism becomes the norm."<sup>14</sup> However, this only explains kindness between related organisms, and not kindness to strangers. To explain the latter, Dawkins resorts to theories of reciprocal altruism.

Reciprocal altruism refers to organisms helping unrelated individuals with the expectation of reciprocal reward in the future. Ultimately, this helps all of their genes propagate over time. An example of this can be seen with vampire bats sharing blood meals with other bats who are unrelated to them. This behaviour and temporary sacrifice creates a blood bank that the bats can collectively benefit from, meaning that each bat is more likely to survive during periods of unsuccessful hunting.

Reputational altruism refers to organisms that behave generously so that they are seen as being benevolent, increasing their likelihood of being chosen for future cooperative actions, be they conjugal or otherwise. For example, a baboon may demonstrate exaggerated grooming behaviour when dominant group members are around, not because the baboon is inherently noble, but because he wishes to be seen as a valuable social partner, and he wishes to be inculcated into a high position within the group. Display altruism is similar to reputational altruism, but it refers more specifically to feats that are performed to show that one is a dominant individual within a society. It is not just a display to show that one is a good partner, but a

display to show that one is dominant, and, thus, that one would make for a good parent to offspring. A peacock displaying its feathers is a sign of it being healthy and confident—a tantalising prospect to many a peahen. Both of these ideas were theorised by Thorstein Veblen and Amotz Zahavi, with Alan Grafen adding an evolutionary lens to the theories.<sup>15,16,17</sup>

These four mechanisms are considered to be the primary motivations behind morality in Dawkins' mind, though this is only true on a certain plane of thinking. Dawkins actually believes that there is no such thing as motivation, will, or choice, and that everything is predetermined through physical processes. We just attribute meaning and purpose to a world of 'pitiless indifference'. To avoid getting bogged down with this latter point—which we have already discussed we shall focus on the mechanisms of morality that Dawkins holds fast to. Dawkins states:

"We now have four good Darwinian reasons for individuals to be altruistic, generous, or 'moral' toward each other. First, there is the special case of genetic kinship. Second, there is reciprocation: the repayment of favors given, and the giving of favors in 'anticipation' of payback. Following on from this, there is, third, the Darwinian benefit of acquiring a reputation for generosity and kindness. And fourth, if Zahavi is correct, there is the particular additional benefit of conspicuous generosity as a way of buying unfakeably authentic advertising."<sup>14</sup>

Whilst reading the above, there may have been a question that came to your mind. You may have asked yourself: what about those decisions I make which, I know, full-well, that are not in my benefit, not in the benefit of my community's chances for survival—perhaps they are even detrimental to the community's chance of survival—but I do them anyway as I believe that they are good? What about these acts of goodness? Sharing your glass of water with a dying man. Giving charity to a hopeless man. Fasting as an act of worship that nobody knows of. Waking up in the middle of the night to pray to God. The examples are too numerous to count.

Dawkins attributes these behaviours to evolutionary misfires. He argues that there is a general evolutionary drive towards things like kin altruism, but that this is not a precise mechanism, and so it may produce seemingly altruistic benefits that do not produce a survival benefit. Thus, he argues, even these are evolutionarily driven. However, this does not actually solve the dilemma. For, you see, prior to even mathematical facts comes our appreciation of choices, understanding, knowledge, and wisdom. We are clearly not machines being governed by evolutionarily inbuilt mechanisms.

You and I know that we see options in the world we inhabit, and that we choose which options we wish to take, and that our choices depend on many, many factors, some of which are more primal (e.g. hunger, sexual desire), and some of which are less so (e.g. fasting, abstaining from sexual relations for a period). Dawkins knows this, too, and it is precisely this choice that he was referring to when he said we are able to rebel against our evolutionary imperatives. Well, to Dawkins, we say that it is precisely within these choices, these decisions, that morality lies.

Just as we saw in the previous chapter, Dawkins has failed to appreciate what his premises lead to. He is showing that there are survival advantages to certain noble actions. This has long been understood, both on a societal level and an individual level. A violent, evil, and unjust society does not benefit its inhabitants, and so it makes more sense for people to develop mutually beneficial behaviours and ‘rules’ to live by. However, this does not mean, as Dawkins suggests, that morality is nothing but an illusion. Nor does it mean that the world is governed only by “blind physical forces and indifference.”<sup>18</sup> His four mechanisms do not mean that nothing else exists.

Further, there are four major problems not addressed by any of these mechanisms:

1. [contention 1] no number of survival mechanisms comprehensively explains all altruistic behaviour;
2. [contention 2] there are many other factors—which we all acknowledge—that are massively underplayed in Dawkins’ framework;
3. [contention 3] Dawkins’ entire framework goes against our most basic understandings of choice and will; and
4. [contention 4] if we are to accept Dawkins’ arguments and follow them through to their logical conclusions, we not only accept that there is no morality, we accept that there is no way to know what there is and what there isn’t—we must become Pyrrhonianists.

Contention 1 refers to the limitations of inductive reasoning, especially when employed weakly in the sociobiological sciences. Dawkins has not reached a comprehensive explanation of how all altruistic behaviour arises, he has just shown that some altruistic behaviours appear to provide survival benefits, or if they do not appear to do so, then at least we can theorise ways in which they may do so. This is hardly groundbreaking or exciting, and it is definitely not an argument against true morality.

Further, the belief in these four mechanisms of biological altruism is not certain. In his book, *Darwinian Fairytales*, David Stove, an atheist and philosopher, calls into question many of the presuppositions of Dawkins' mechanisms.<sup>19</sup> He takes particular issue with wishy-washy theories conjured up by biologists that do not reflect the reality on the ground. For example, for all this talk about kin altruism, we do not seem to see it at all with sister bacteria. Stove writes:

“As well as that theory’s inconsistency with Darwinism, there is another objection: its inconsistency with the facts. For between sister bacteria, and between parthenogenetically reproducing dandelions and their offspring, there is no kin altruism. Not just much less of it than the theory leads one to expect—there is none at all. Two sister bacteria, despite their genetic identity, will compete for the means of subsistence, just like any other good Darwinian pair.”<sup>19</sup>

Even in humans, it really does not seem like we are only acting due to evolutionary misfires from selfish genes. Instead, it seems much more likely that we empathise with people and decide to help them or to help ourselves based on a decision we make. To this end, Stove writes:

“Consider our enormous present expenditure of money and effort on public health, education, unemployment relief, and the like. (What a facade this is!) And then recall that there are thousands of Darwinists who are currently puzzling over whether altruism exists, most of whom conclude, in line with their theory, that it doesn’t really exist! If only one had the linguistic prowess to capture the essence of this colossal ‘scientific’ farce!”<sup>19</sup>

And whilst all this goes to show just how uncertain the mechanisms proposed by Dawkins are, a theist is not in any need to disprove them to justify himself. The whole point of contention 1 was to show that even if someone managed to show that all of these theories were proven to be able to generate biological impulses towards altruistic actions, it would not mean that nothing else is in play. A theist would not be affected in the least, even if Stove was wrong in all of his critiques and Dawkins was right.

Contention 2 highlights that whilst Dawkins and those like him acknowledge cultural and religious influences on behaviour, they consider them nothing but accidents of an evolutionary process. This is very interesting. For one, it is entirely unproven and it flies in the face of our most basic intuitions of free will, choice, and so on. For another, it is precisely the outcomes of religious practice and foreign cultures that Dawkins' xenophobia

and religious intolerance is directed towards. Does he not, when he sees a person kill in the name of religion, consider this, also, to be nothing but an accident of an evolutionary process done in the absence of free will and controlled only by a genetic code that shows pitiless indifference? No, he does not. Believing as much would be ludicrous, and even Dawkins is not that great a zealot. It is clear that he does not even believe his own words, or at least that he does not act as though he does.

Dawkins wishes to both have his cake and eat it. When it suits him, religion is to blame for as much evil in the world as he can get away with attributing to it. Then, when the shoe is on the other foot, he tries to underplay all the good that religion brings into the world. Here, he argues that it is not religion which motivates people, but it is an inbuilt genetic code that we cannot control which commands us to do good. His biases are clear for all to see.

Contention 3 concerns morality, free will, and choices. Dawkins moralises to no end in his public discourse. He knows, and we know, that free will is not an illusion, that choice is real, and that this choice is where morality lies. Recall how, in his debate with Lennox, Dawkins said, "... we can effectively rebel against the blind forces that brought us here."<sup>5</sup> What is this rebellion against the blind forces of nature that he speaks of other than one's free will? The ability to choose between good and evil. This choice is exactly where morality lies.

Muslims believe that humans are charged with moral responsibility precisely because they are able to make decisions. We do not need to deny that there are survival advantages to being a good person. In fact, we agree that there are survival advantages to being a good person. Showing us some of these benefits does not prove or disprove anything. However, all of us know that there are times in our lives in which we do things that do not offer a survival advantage, but we do them anyway because we know that they are good. We are not being commanded to do so by a genetic code. Instead, we have a real choice ahead of us.

This choice, this free will of ours, is not reducible to physical processes, and so any attempt to understand it purely through mechanical interactions will necessarily fail. Even Descartes understood this, and it is why he excluded free will from his mechanistic view of the world. Many great minds have reached similar conclusions, and Dawkins has done nothing to disprove this. His claim of free will being an illusion is question begging, as it presupposes the non-existence of anything non-physical in the first place. It is a laughable argument, philosophically speaking, and it directly contradicts his other argument of us being able to rebel against the forces that blindly control us.

Contention 4 highlights something we have already discussed at length in our chapter on scientism and scepticism. In a purely evolutionary paradigm in which there is nothing but physical forces interplaying, there is no meaning or correctness. Moreover, our squishy and mostly liquid brains have no reason to be seeing reality as it is. What we view as ‘correct’ may only be correct in our own minds, whilst the reality of the world may be very different. This theory is accepted by many evolutionary biologists and atheists. Psychologist Richard Gregory notes that, “There are increasing discrepancies between perceptions and conceptions with science’s advances, which makes it hard to define ‘illusion’.”<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, Donald Hoffman presented an interface theory of perception, writing:

“The interface theory (or desktop theory) weakens the claim [that our perception matches reality] even further: perception need not, and in general does not, resemble any aspect of reality (Hoffman, 1998, 2009). Whereas naive and critical realism assert that perception is useful because, exhaustively or in part, it is true, the desktop theory asserts that perception can be useful because it is not true. Just as a Windows desktop hides the complexity of computer hardware, perception hides the complexity of the reality it represents, and instead provides a species-specific guide to action.”<sup>21</sup>

Thus, if all Dawkins has intellectual recourse to is an evolutionary paradigm, then not only is this paradigm—which is based on fallible perceptions—suspect, but so is all knowledge. With no metaphysical or theological grounding for truth and logic, it is all but an assumption. Albeit an abstract point, it is far from inconsequential if one wishes to be rigorous in their pursuit of truth. If your epistemological framework cannot stand on its own and is self-refuting, then perhaps you are missing something in the bigger picture. Perhaps there is more to life than just natural selection, and perhaps Dawkins is missing all of it.

Reality is far more beautiful than Dawkins depicts it. Far from the pitiless indifference he describes, there is genuine beauty and goodness. Sentient creatures sacrifice out of love, and that love is not predetermined biology being forced upon us. In fact, it is a choice that we make and we do so consciously. Noam Chomsky once stated, “There is no mechanistic determination of that [i.e. choice]. We know that as well as we know anything at all. And that is irreducible phenomenal knowledge, experience... We have no reason to doubt that at the moment.”<sup>22</sup>

The choices we make may well be beneficial to our species as a whole, and to life as a whole, but they are often not. One need only to look at just how much of our planet and its creatures humans are currently destroying to appreciate this. The New Atheists wish to gaslight people into thinking the choices they make are not real choices but are pre-determined—either absolutely or statistically determined—phenomena that they do not control. Then, in the same breath, they are ready to kill entire populations of people in anger at the choices—or potential choices—of those people. The behaviour of every determinist truly does belie their claim. Theists are generally of the opinion that no one who claims to be a moral relativist is actually a moral relativist. No matter how hard they try, nobody is able to truly lose their humanity.

## CHAPTER 6

# On New Atheism and Violence

Dawkins, Harris, Dennett, Hitchens, and their followers often argue that religions are violent and intolerant. Religion is usually bundled together as a monolithic entity that is, for some reason or other, irrational and oppressive. Meanwhile, all the views of the New Atheist religion are never to be seen as such. We have already shown the moral bankruptcy of such a position from a philosophical point of view. How can a moral relativist moralise and claim moral supremacy? They can't. This chapter will ignore that point and pretend, for a moment, that the New Atheists are not contradicting themselves. That way, we can better examine the New Atheists' own violent and imperialist tendencies.

Dawkins refers to God as being “unjust, unforgiving... genocidal” and more.<sup>1</sup> Harris writes that “Some propositions are so dangerous that it may even be ethical to kill people for believing them.”<sup>2</sup> Dennett wishes to “study religion as a natural phenomenon,” and Hitchens believed that “Religion poisons everything.”<sup>3,4</sup> It is amazing to think that these words came from the proponents of some of the worst humanitarian disasters the world has ever seen. These ideologues want to kill religion so badly that they supported the Iraq war, the Afghanistan invasion, the destabilisation of the Middle East, and so much more.

Before atheism was a popular belief system, the world was almost entirely full of theists, and it was not a ‘secular’ space. Even now, there is no true secularity, all that has happened is one ideology has been replaced with another. In the modern Western case, Christianity has been replaced by modern liberalism. Anyway, during that earlier period, whenever a political action was undertaken—good or bad—there were people who would justify that action through religion. Thus, it became easy to attribute any

evil political action to the religion of those carrying it out, even if their true aims were far more malevolent and personal.

Dawkins and others use this phenomenon to suggest that it is religion—and not impulses such as greed, lust, and so on—that makes people violent. Meanwhile, Dawkins et al. almost completely ignore the good actions—such as charity, medical work, medical advances, the invention of hospitals, pensions, universities, plumbing systems, forms of governance and administration, and so on—carried out in the name of religion, giving these actions only a passing mention. If he was being fair, then Dawkins would be grateful to religious people for having provided him with so much of what he enjoys every day.

What makes the New Atheists squirm even more, however, is how the world has developed over the past century. As countries became increasingly secular, we saw increasingly greater numbers of deaths across the world. Now, we rely on an incredible amount surveillance, policing, and state-endorsed violence to suppress our populations. In the United States, for example, 1 in 17 white males and 1 in 3 black males born in 2001 can expect to be incarcerated at least once in their lifetime if current trends continue.<sup>5</sup>

And there is something even more concerning for the New Atheists. Whilst the above information is correct regarding post-Christian and post-religious secular governments that still heavily rely on the moral framework of their religious predecessors, it is not true for true atheistic governments. In these cases, the violence and horrors reached new levels. North Korea, the Soviet Union, China (under the Chinese Communist Party), Cambodia (under the Khmer Rouge), revolutionary France, and countries affiliated with the Soviet Union make up the main atheistic states throughout history, and that list reads like the cast of a political horror movie. Do we really need to tally up the millions and millions and millions of people these atheistic states have killed in such a short period of time? It boggles the mind how violent a belief system can be.

Contrast that with Islam. There are approximately 50 Muslim-majority countries in the world, and Islam has been politically strong for over 1,400 years.<sup>6</sup> In that whole period and across the entire map, you would not find a single polity that matches the likes of Stalin and Pol Pot in terms of sheer number of deaths caused and misery spread. It is not even close. If correlation is anything to go by, atheism is the most evil political belief system to have ever existed. But is that really a surprise when we all know atheists have no objective morals?

More interesting, even, is the imperialistic tendency of atheism. It seems almost always to cause a rush for not just political domination but en-

forced restrictions on religious practice, if not the outright persecution of believers. The Soviet Union and its allies, the Khmer Rouge, revolutionary France, and others serve as lasting reminders of the ideological zealotry that accompanies atheistic governments. Under Stalin countless people were executed, many more were sent to Gulags, religious leaders were targeted and religious institutions were systematically dismantled—houses of worship were not spared from this terror, and there was no concern paid to the value of human endeavours and achievements.<sup>7</sup> British historian Antony Beevor once wrote, “All too often the Whites represented the worst examples of humanity. For ruthless inhumanity, however, the Bolsheviks were unbeatable.”<sup>8</sup>

A common response when confronted with the fact that atheistic governments have been exponentially more murderous than their religious counterparts is that these governments are more communist than atheist, and that it is communism which drives the killing. It is true that most—though not all—of these governments were communist, but that argument does not absolve atheism. In fact, one could easily argue that a traditional religious belief system, such as Islam, is what precludes hideous ideologies such as communism from arising. In fact, only in recent, secular times have phenomena such as state atheist oppression emerged.

Communism itself came from atheism, with its founders, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, explicitly rejecting religion and wishing to develop a new, atheistic worldview. The difference between them and the New Atheists is that they managed to secure power, so the world was able to see their anti-religious horror in action. And although the New Atheists lack the political power the communists once wielded, they have shown themselves to be no less relentless in their attacks on religious people. For example, during the height of the American invasion of Iraq, which has led to over 600,000 civilian deaths, Hitchens said, “I think it’s us, plus the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne and the 101st, who are the real fighters for secularism at the moment, the ones who are really fighting the main enemy.”<sup>9</sup>

Historically, state atheism appears to show its anti-religious ambitions most during periods of societal upheaval and distress. This was seen in the French revolution and during the rise of communist regimes. In both of these cases, there was a persistent drive to create a secular society at the expense of the faithful and their institutions. Invariably, this drive led to huge volumes of violence, persecution, and misery. These institutions have also been characterised by their repressive and militant nature, such as in revolutionary France, with its mass execution of counter-revolutionaries—including priests and nuns—and in Soviet Russia, with its restrictions on religious congregations and practice. Relics of this are seen today in these

secular, post-atheist countries, with, for example, France's current ban on religious clothing, which forces women and girls to undress to a level the French secularists are happy with, stripping them of their clothing and freedom. This repression needs to be persistent and forceful to keep the population from living the way they wish to, and to keep people from believing what they wish—'out of sight, out of mind' is the mantra.

Unlike their predecessors—who managed to wrest political power—Dawkins et al. do not overtly refer to themselves with titles such as the 'League of Militant Atheists'.<sup>10</sup> However, this does not stop them behaving similarly and waiting for an opportunity in which there is political upheaval to enact their plans. New Atheism is a weakening force with no direct political power. Instead, they resort to touting lies about things such as weapons of mass destruction in an effort to cheerlead for wars that are costing countless lives.<sup>11</sup> In fact, it is through support for war that the New Atheist movement really gained any prominence, and it is in the absence of war and upheaval that the movement will perish.

Steven Poole insightfully remarks:

"Whatever happened to "New Atheism"? It was born in the febrile aftermath of 9/11, when belief in a deity — or, let's be honest, specifically in Allah — seemed to some people a newly urgent danger to western civilisation. Sam Harris began writing *The End of Faith* (2004) immediately after the World Trade Center attacks, and it became a bestseller. There followed the philosopher Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell*, Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*, and Christopher Hitchens's *God Is Not Great*.

... In many ways the conversation already seems dated in its political preoccupations, particularly in the idea proffered by Hitchens that "holy war" was the greatest existential threat to civilisation. (There had been nothing holy about the cold war, which brought us closest to the brink of planetary Armageddon, and North Korea now is not a theocracy, but never mind.)"<sup>12</sup>

Elsewhere, he remarks:

"But faith is very much a movable feast: Hitchens himself, in his sad late persona as a useful idiot for the Bush-Cheney regime in the mid-2000s, notably kept insisting — in the face of no evidence — that Saddam Hussein had possessed a working nuclear-weapons programme, which proved that it had been right all along to invade Iraq."<sup>12</sup>

Russell Foster, Nick Megoran, and Michael Dunn analysed the moral contradictions and imperialist tendencies of the New Atheists in their paper titled, *Towards a Geopolitics of Atheism: Critical Geopolitics Post the ‘War on Terror’*. They identified that:

“For New Atheist thinkers, the argument that religions begets violence is not merely historical. For them, the belief that violence is ontogenetic to religion translates into a normative vision that is expressed in political and geopolitical terms, framing contemporary geopolitical insecurities as the inevitable consequence of a single bitter root — religion. This vision leads some of them to articulate vociferous support for the Bush and Blair-era War on Terror. This reduction and repackaging of complex and multilayered geopolitical issues as a vociferously-trumpeted essentialism is, in its illusory moncausality and seductive simplicity, as misleading as the classical geopolitics of Mackinder and Ratzel.”<sup>13</sup>

They go on to dissect the New Atheist movement and the ask the question of whether this movement leads to violence or not. Their insights are piercing and worth quoting at some length:

“Undoubtedly the most striking phenomenon in recent atheist thought is the emergence of ‘New Atheism,’ coined by Gary Wolf in a 2006 article ‘The Church of Non-Believers.’ The key contributions to this literature are a series of anti-theistic, politically-inclined books which appeared in the aftermath of 9/11: Sam Harris’ *End of Faith* (2004), Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion* (2007), and the late Christopher Hitchens’ *God is Not Great* (2007). Although they do not invoke the term ‘New Atheist,’ they play with their negative characterisation as ‘aggressive and dangerous’ (Zenk, 2013, p. 254).

Furthermore, little of what the New Atheists say is actually new. Ostling (2013) contends that most of their arguments were made with greater force and eloquence by the Enlightenment philosophers. Kluge (2009) argues that if we analyse the ‘old atheists’ we see that they covered almost all of the major themes of the New Atheists...

If their arguments are not particularly new, why has the concept of New Atheism attracted such attention? We identify three reasons.

First, New Atheists' views that any religion is not only false, but indelibly malevolent.

... Second, New Atheism is not a passive philosophy but an active product of current geopolitical configurations between Western liberal democracies and majority-Muslim countries (including their diasporas).

... Third, the media success of New Atheism. The climate of fear over violent Islamic jihadism has fuelled media interest in the movement (Amarasingam, 2010; Zenk, 2013). New Atheist writers are charismatic and media-savvy, while their combative and acerbic style and willingness to make bold generalisations about the apparent evils of religion make them media-friendly in a way that contrasts with the more ponderous style of academic philosophy.”<sup>13</sup>

These New Atheists never wanted peace:

“Indeed, for Hitchens the Afghanistan invasion was to be applauded because peace with Islam ‘is neither possible, nor desirable’ (Hitchens, 2011) and the Iraq invasion was ‘a war to be proud of’ (Hitchens, 2005b). ‘How did I get Iraq wrong?’ he asks rhetorically amidst much hand-wringing by pundits on the fifth anniversary of the invasion. ‘I didn’t,’ was his unrepentant reply to former allies on the left who now excoriated him as a ‘model apostate’ (Finkelstein, 2008).

Of course, it would be unfair to tar all atheists with the same brush. For Richard Seymour, Hitchens had become ‘a poetaster of genocide’ whose ‘deranged fantasies about killing more and more evil-doers’ attracted support only amongst Republican-voting ‘malodorous macho assholes’ and ‘post-pubescent neophytic imperialists’ (Seymour 2008: 326). Hitchens’ borderline sadism is no more indicative of a homogeneous atheist bloc than the Taliban are of a homogeneous Islam — because neither exists. Yet he does symbolise identifiable strands of thinking among the dominant New Atheist writers.”<sup>13</sup>

Not all atheists are quite so imperialistic, but the New Atheists would be the first to tell us that an ideology is not impugned due to the presence of a few good apples. Especially if that ideology views murder and rape as not inherently evil in the first place.

There are nearly 2,000,000,000 Muslims worldwide, and there are billions who have come and died, all praying and living simple, peaceful lives, yet the New Atheists feel the need to be at war with these people—all of them. Otherwise, how on earth could they ensure these people won't become violent in the future? Should theists do the same and start killing atheists, because atheists are moral relativists who think in utilitarian terms and would kill if they saw that as beneficial in any given moment? Of Course not!

Just pause and think for a moment how insane the logic of the New Atheists is. Sam Harris has discussed in his book the potential justification for pre-emptively and indiscriminately bombing Muslim countries in case they attacked the West after getting their hands on powerful weapons.<sup>15</sup> He has also declared that the West is at war with Islam.<sup>14</sup> Now, what would a logical and sensible reader say if that was to be reversed. What would they say if one suggested that Muslim countries should pre-emptively and indiscriminately bomb the West in case the West bombed Muslims first. And what would they say if one argued that Islam was at war with the West, rallying Muslims to be indiscriminately aggressive and repulsive? There would be no end to the backlash, and rightfully so, as those are intolerably violent comments that speak of a twisted, hateful, and irreligious mind.

Whatever the excuse, whether it is to liberate the locals, to rid the world of an ideology, to save themselves from weapons of mass destruction, or something else, the New Atheists have proven time and time again that they are an incredibly violent, dangerous, and zealous bunch of religious extremists.



## CHAPTER 7

# On the Fragmentation of New Atheism

New Atheism rose on the back of the 9/11 attacks in America. It rode the rising wave of anti-Islam rhetoric, and its charismatic leaders used this momentum to sell record numbers of books. It is a movement that defined itself through the hatred of another. What began as a xenophobic cult—ignoring, or even supporting the many war crimes carried out in Muslim lands by Western powers, and focussing only on the 9/11 terrorist attack, turned into a mainstream religion. Nothing within its central tenets was new, and it was not founded on any groundbreaking or powerful philosophy. Rather, the New Atheists merely renewed a Soviet-style hatred for all things religious. In fact, the New Atheists were, perhaps, more severe in their hatred. What they lacked was any direct political power.

However, hatred is limited. Hatred is not a particularly constructive emotion. Merely proclaiming that religion is evil and that only secular humanism is good only gets one so far in terms of convincing people. Without any arguments to support this—at least none that bear genuine weight—and without a sound philosophical framework on which to build their new religion, the New Atheists have long been in decline. They have also become increasingly disunited. In the Quran, we are told:

“Fear of you [believers] is more intense in their hearts than fear of God because they are people devoid of understanding. Even united they would never fight you, except from within fortified strongholds or behind high walls. There is much hostility between them: you think they are united but their hearts are divided because they are people devoid of reason.”<sup>1</sup>

Part of the New Atheists' decline is attributable to the weakness of their arguments. These weak arguments are polemically 'useful' when people are angry and looking for an excuse to hate Muslims or theists in general. They are less 'useful', however, when people are more sober and looking at the world more objectively. Part of the decline is also because, as time has gone on, the scaremongering of the New Atheists has proven to be nonsense. There never were any weapons of mass destruction, and the New Atheists now have the blood of over a million Muslims to answer for. Nor is 'holy war' looking like the greatest existential threat to humanity—at least not any war instigated by Muslims.

And so, by now, the New Atheists have begun to be seen for the hate preachers they are. Steven Poole answers the question of what became of these four founding fathers of New Atheism:

"What did they all do next? Dennett let the subject lie and returned to questions of evolution and philosophy... Dawkins became a leading social-media troll, with tweets such as this from last summer: "Listening to the lovely bells of Winchester, one of our great mediaeval cathedrals. So much nicer than the aggressive-sounding 'Allahu Akbar.' Or is that just my cultural upbringing?"... Harris ended up in the company of the "alt-right" and the so-called "intellectual dark web", populated by people who portray themselves as valiant enough to say what you're not allowed to say any more, and are constantly invited on rightwing talk shows to say it."<sup>2</sup>

Hitchens, for his part, died.

Yet another part of the decline of the New Atheists was due to their inconsistent application of liberal humanism. The founders have repeatedly struggled to merge their fierce atheism with liberal values in the real world. Hints of this were seen very early on in the movement. During the only ever in-person meeting between the four, Harris' repeated mention of the possible genetic superiority of some races or one gender over another was hushed and brushed aside by Hitchens, who seemed more aware of the optics of having such a discussion.<sup>2</sup> Harris was at risk of saying the quiet part out loud. White supremacy is still not something people can speak of comfortably in public spaces; Hitler has not been dead for long enough for people to have forgotten where arguments for racial supremacy can lead.

Gender supremacy is a little—though only a little—easier to discuss in a public setting, and so it makes for a useful case study through which we can see the splintering of the New Atheist movement. A watershed moment in this regard was the 2011 World Atheist Convention in Dublin,

in which Rebecca Watson, a major atheist and feminist voice, spoke about widespread sexism among atheists.<sup>3</sup> Watson complained about having been made to feel uncomfortable by a man who made an advance towards her in an elevator, an enclosed space. Some people sympathised with her, whilst others, such as Dawkins, dismissed her concerns and argued that she should, “Just avoid the guy.”<sup>3</sup>

In a vile letter in which he was arguing that Muslim women are abused and that women like Watson have nothing to complain about, Dawkins was even more dismissive. He is no friend to Muslim women—the piece was a polemical one full of lies and vitriol, but that is typical of his internet troll attitude towards these things. In the letter, Dawkins wrote:

“Only this week, I heard of one; she calls herself Skepchick, and do you know what happened to her? A man in a hotel elevator invited her back to his room for coffee. I am not exaggerating. He really did. He invited her back to his room for coffee. Of course, she said no, and of course, he didn’t lay a finger on her, but even so...

And you, Muslima, think you have misogyny to complain about! For goodness sake, grow up, or at least grow a thicker skin.

Richard”<sup>4</sup>

Yikes! Watson was firm in her response to this criticism, saying:

“Richard Dawkins will no longer be rewarded with my money, my praise, my attention. I will no longer recommend his books to others, buy them as presents, or buy them for my own library. I will not attend his lectures or recommend that others do the same.”<sup>5</sup>

These are incredibly harsh words when we consider the context. Watson was major figure in the New Atheist movement and an early supporter of Dawkins, and ‘elevatorgate’ was centred around her comments at the World Atheist Convention—a pilgrimage for many atheist activists the world over. Dawkins then rubbished her complaints in a charged public document, because he was upset that she was exposing illiberalism within his movement. In Christian terms, it would be as if the pope came to *Loggia delle Benedizioni* and stuck two fingers up at an adoring bishop.

Without realising it, Dawkins was becoming a pope in his own right, and of his own religion. He was the patriarch, and he was deciding whose qualms were worth considering and whose were not. In the aftermath of elevatorgate, many feminists began to express their frustrations more loudly, contending that New Atheism was becoming another patriarchal religion which marginalised the voices of women. For the New Atheists,

this was a huge problem, as secular humanism and liberal values are what they had long touted to be perfect moral solutions for all ages. This was showing them to be very illiberal themselves.

Dr Marcie Bianco wrote:

“The second explanation for why the atheism movement foments sexism can be found in what Dawkins himself said during a 2002 TED Talk called “militant atheism.” Instead of practicing atheism as a kind of absenteeism from religion—which is how I approach it—Dawkins presents the case for an atheism that aggressively attacks other religions. Even more pernicious is the way he argues for a moral and organizational structure on par with orthodox religions. “We need a consciousness-raising, coming-out campaign for American atheists,” Dawkins said. “When a critical mass has been obtained, there’s an abrupt acceleration in recruitment. And again, it will need money.”

As a capitalist-fuelled institution, New Atheism has established itself as a mirror image of religion, with Dawkins and friends situating themselves at the pinnacle of the movement—in the role of God. Feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz put it this way: “God is dead; long live man! Nietzsche said it all, and Dawkins [and the male leaders of the movement] have resurrected man as god.” She goes further “The mirroring of religion is apparent in the movement’s structural hierarchy. White men are at the top, serving as featured speakers at events and figureheads of the movement. Everyone else remains in the pews and balconies. This social stratification is both sexist and racist. Take Dawkins’s contention that Islamophobia is a “non-word,” or his “Dear Muslim” letter, or the “Feminists Love Islamists” video he tweeted last week.”<sup>6</sup>

Katha Pollitt simply asks, “Why would women join a movement led by sexists and populated by trolls?”<sup>6</sup> She is right to wonder as much when these founders are of the opinion that their moral code is absolute. Dawkins, as we mentioned earlier, went as far as making his own ten commandments, advising people on how to live their lives. He panders to liberals and humanists, but he does not readily explain the darker undertones of his belief system to them.

When the four patriarchs of New Atheism met, they began touching on ideas of social Darwinism and racial and gender supremacy.<sup>2</sup> They managed to stop themselves before expanding fully on any points, but time has

gone on to show that they do, in fact, harbour quite alarming views. Poole, whom we quoted earlier for his piercing insights, writes:

“For instance, Hitchens says, if the notorious hypothesis of the 1994 book by Richard J Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve* — that black people are genetically inferior in intelligence to white people — were true, it shouldn’t be ignored. Luckily, Hitchens hastens to add, that example is not viable. Later on, however, Harris brings up the argument again. “If there were reliable differences in intelligence between races or genders,” he begins, before Hitchens cuts him off dismissively. “But I don’t think any of us here do think that that’s the case.”

Hitchens might have been too generous. In 2018, Harris caused a storm by inviting Charles Murray on to his podcast for a weirdly uncritical two-hour conversation. Murray, Harris claimed, had been the victim of a terrible “academic injustice” for the way in which his notions about the inherent cognitive inferiority of some “races” had been rejected by the scientific establishment. (Lest you worry about Murray, be reassured that he is still a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, which is funded by the ultra-conservative billionaire Koch brothers.)

This is where the fearless insistence on entertaining uncomfortable questions can so easily lead. Harris ended up in the company of the “alt-right” and the so-called “intellectual dark web”, populated by people who portray themselves as valiant enough to say what you’re not allowed to say any more, and are constantly invited on rightwing talk shows to say it. For some, New Atheism was never about God at all, but just a topical subgenre of the rightwing backlash against the supposedly suffocating atmosphere of “political correctness”<sup>2</sup>.

These ideas of social Darwinism and this incongruity with historical truths is, perhaps, the biggest cause of clashes between the New Atheists and modern liberals. For all their talk about moral relativism, the New Atheists are anything but so in practice. They are zealots who forward their own views of the world, views which most of the world disagrees with, and views which even their own colleagues often disagree with. This does not stop them arguing for its violent and non-violent propagation.

In *The Atheist’s Guide to Reality*, Rosenberg comments on racism and xenophobia, saying that they “are optimally adapted to maximize the representation of your genes in the next generation, instead of some stranger’s

genes.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Darwin felt that women were inferior to men by quite some degree, writing, “The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shewn by man attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than woman can attain—whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands...”<sup>8</sup>

This belief was never done away with by the New Atheists, and it is what Harris and Hitchens were alluding to during their meeting, before they quietened down. It is also the belief which spurred on the Social Darwinists in their aggressions against whole peoples, and it differs in character, fundamentally, from Abrahamic understandings of people.

“Truly, we have ennobled the children of Adam,” we are told in the Qu-ran.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, we are told, “O mankind! We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God’s eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware.”<sup>10</sup> There is a shared and inherent honour in being human, and whilst there are notable differences between males and females, and differences in the roles they often carry out, this does not make one more noble than another. That distinction is made, we are told, by good conduct and God-consciousness.

The New Atheists do not have such a framework to save them. In their world, there is no inherent nobility, no meaning, no value. To many New Atheist idealists, it is a simple case of women being less evolutionarily developed than men, and of black-skinned people being less evolutionarily developed than white-skinned people.

It is these same ideas that put them at odds with many feminists. Females being intellectually and physically inferior, as well as being unfit for certain roles due to their gender, is not something feminists want to hear. The matter is extremely dire in an atheistic paradigm. Consider the following syllogism:

- P1: Nothing other than the physical world exists.
- P2: Men have stronger bodies and stronger intellects than women.
- C1: Men are better in every meaningful way than women.
- P3: White men have similar body strengths and stronger intellects than black men.
- C2: White men are better than black men.

This is how the New Atheists and their social Darwinist thought works (although they would never admit to such things publicly, God forbid!). It discounts anything non-physical (e.g. soul, mind) and then pits bodies

against one another, favouring recent history to satisfy their white male biases. From there, they gather ideas of racial and gender supremacy that, if left unchecked, go on to support violence against ‘inferior’ races and cultures, unless those races and cultures agree to submit to their ideology and way of life. It really is a hateful world they have dreamt up.

In addition to what we have already mentioned, there have been even more tensions and infighting within the New Atheist movement, with gender issues being a particularly sensitive topic. Dawkins endorsed J K Rowling’s views on gender, which coincide with traditional understandings of gender that 3<sup>rd</sup> wave feminism has moved beyond.<sup>11</sup> He subsequently had his “Humanist of the Year” award revoked by the American Humanist Society.<sup>12</sup> When he recommended a book titled *The End of Gender* on Twitter, fellow atheist, Matt Dillahunty, replied to him, writing, “How many other things have you strongly recommended on the basis that ‘if even half is true’...? Just fucking retire. You’re an embarrassment.”<sup>13</sup>

The backlash against Dawkins has been significant, and he seems to have lost his short-lived position as the torchbearer for humanists. When commenting on why he was stripped of his award, the American Humanist Society wrote, “Dawkins has over the past several years accumulated a history of making statements that use the guise of scientific discourse to demean marginalised groups, an approach antithetical to humanist values.”<sup>14</sup> It seems that even within his own religious movement, Dawkins has been deselected.



## CHAPTER 8

# On Death, Meaning and Spirituality

New Atheism began as a movement in the early post-9/11 era. Its founders were anti-theistic, in general, but anti-Islamic in particular. It was a movement generated by hatred and built on this infertile ground. Over time, flaws in the New Atheists' way of thinking became increasingly apparent, and it became clear that they are doing nothing other than regurgitating old sceptical arguments against the belief in God. They failed to build a worldview which could actually flourish, and their arguments were largely self-refuting when they tried to do so.

Labelling themselves as humanists, they tried to shirk the label of moral relativists, but this did not convince many. Serious philosophers saw the clear circular reasoning and imperialist undertones of their efforts, while the laity found them to be very illiberal and un-humanist in practice. Dawkins, in particular, has taken much flak for his immoral comments, which have become a common feature of his new life as an internet troll.

Dawkins tried to portray himself and his movement as enlightened humanitarians fighting for human rights, while in reality, he was exposed by his own words as a bigot with little understanding of his opponents. Dawkins' movement started after the 9/11 attacks, and his followers grew due to his aggressive stance on Islam. New Atheists have garnered notoriety as hate preachers. In peacetime, they tend to be more subtle in their xenophobia but whenever an opportunity to stoke the fires of violence against Muslims arises, the New Atheists are never far away. They were vocal in support of the interventions in the Middle East that have cost countless lives and have cost those countries an immeasurable sum of lost output. Thus, they are no longer seen as moral preachers of reason—they are xenophobic ideologues with blood on their hands.

However, increasingly over time, Westerners started to see that the War on Terror (off the back of which New Atheism piggybacked) was a farce, and militancy in the Muslim world was fueled by oppression and neo-colonialism. Not reading the air, Dawkins continued his attacks on Islam. In his most explicit statement showcasing his disturbing mind, he posted online:

“Of course you can have an opinion about Islam without having read Qur'an. You don't have to read Mein Kampf to have an opinion about nazism.”<sup>1</sup>

The reaction to this statement reveals everything. Online, people mocked him for his ignorance; he claims to be a champion of reason, yet he immaturely attacks a religion followed by nearly a quarter of humanity without even bothering to understand its central texts. He made this outrageous statement in 2013, but had he done so in 2003, when Hitchens was cheer-leading the Iraq War and Bush was bombing Muslim countries with impunity, he might have escaped scrutiny. Back then, anti-Islam hysteria was rampant in the West, but by 2013, with over a million Muslims slaughtered by Western powers, this hatred was increasingly recognized as a convenient cover for Western governments to justify invasions and plunder of Muslim nations. Dawkins' disgraceful display as a puppet for imperialism coupled with his incompetence was evident for all to see, and overall New Atheism by then had started its decline.

However, the primary reason for its decline was not the shambolic nature of its political positions or its incoherent and unfounded philosophy, but rather its failure to address the human condition. Human beings need answers to the big questions, why are we here? Is there more to life than materialism? How can we deal with suffering and evil in the world? What is the meaning and purpose of life? How can we deal with our own mortality? What is the best way to attain inner happiness and peace? What is spirituality and can we be spiritual in a rational way?

The New Atheism movement did not provide answers to these questions. In fact the cold rational arguments that they gave were not only intellectually unconvincing they were positively in denial of our spiritual thirst. While the movement vehemently criticized organized religion, it largely overlooked the intrinsic human need for spiritual fulfillment. The reductionist perspective of humanity prevalent in New Atheism failed to acknowledge that spirituality transcends rituals or religious institutions. This neglect ultimately disillusioned individuals searching for a more holistic approach to life, driving them away from the movement. New Atheism's

inability to provide a compelling narrative or framework for dealing with life's complexities rendered it increasingly irrelevant.

From a Darwinian standpoint, one must consider why humans possess such a persistent need for spirituality if it does not provide immediate survival advantages. Evolutionary psychology suggests that religion and spirituality may have developed as adaptive traits that enhance social cohesion, cooperation, and group survival. As David Sloan Wilson, an evolutionary biologist argues that religion can be viewed as a system of social behaviours and beliefs that have evolved to serve specific functions within human societies. He believes that the persistence of religious systems across cultures suggests they have played a significant role in human survival and social organisation.<sup>2</sup> These traits could have given early human communities a sense of unity and purpose, helping them navigate life's challenges in harsh environments.

Despite this, the Darwinian explanation for spirituality is sorely lacking evidence; while it may try to account for the social functions of religion, it does not address the subjective reality of spiritual experiences reported by countless individuals. The feelings of transcendence, connection, and meaning associated with spirituality cannot be attributed to evolutionary mechanisms. Interestingly while New Atheist leaders failed to address humanity's spiritual needs, Harris picked up on this requirement and tried to give answers.

In his article *Islam and the Misuses of Ecstasy* Harris acknowledges the profound emotional responses elicited by spiritual practices, particularly within Islam. He observes, "I know contemplative rituals of this kind can be extremely rewarding<sup>3</sup>," specifically citing the Dhikr (the repetition of God's names or the mention of God's attributes) practiced by Muslim devotees, which evokes a state of ecstasy and profound emotional connection. He also highlights the beauty and spiritual power of the call to prayer, describing it as "one of the most beautiful sounds on earth." His reflections emphasize the rich array of spiritual experiences even militant atheists encounter, which cannot simply be dismissed as mere byproducts of evolutionary processes.

Harris wrote a book to try and convince atheists of the reality of spirituality and how to attain it. In his book *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion* he writes:

"Whenever I use the word, as in referring to meditation as a "spiritual practice," I hear from fellow skeptics and atheists who think that I have committed a grievous error . . . I do not share their semantic concerns. Yes, to walk the aisles of any "spiritual" bookstore is to confront the yearning and credulity of our species by

the yard, but there is no other term -- apart from the even more problematic mystical or the more restrictive contemplative-- with which to discuss the efforts people make, through meditation, psychedelics, or other means, to fully bring their minds into the present or to induce nonordinary states of consciousness. And no other word links this spectrum of experience to our ethical lives.”<sup>4</sup>

The main crux of the book is that we can get the benefits that religious people get from spirituality without having to believe in anything like a God or anything supernatural. His secular spirituality boils down to meditation on our own consciousness:

“Investigating the nature of consciousness itself--and transforming its contents through deliberate training--is the basis of spiritual life”.

The proof for Harris is in the pudding, his argument is that meditation works and it can benefit your mind, body and spirit:

“[T]here are good reasons to believe that adopting a practice like meditation can lead to positive changes in one’s life. But the deepest goal of spirituality is freedom from the illusion of the self--and to seek such freedom, as though it were a future state to be attained through effort, is to reinforce the chains of one’s apparent bondage in each moment.”

The issues with his book become apparent when one examines the previous narratives put forth by the authorities of New Atheism. Where is the evidence for the existence of spirituality in a cold rational argument? Simply acquiescing to ideas because they seem effective is characteristic of backward religious simpletons, is it not? Harris cannot persuade the masses because he fails to meet even the standards established by New Atheism itself. Where is the empirical evidence for spirituality? Provide a clear definition devoid of the vague language Harris employs in the book; it should be pinned down precisely. Harris is unable to do this; at best, he can offer a utilitarian argument for the benefits of spirituality (without defining it in scientific terms). However, this approach stands in stark contrast to the core tenets of New Atheism. It is no surprise that other leaders within the New Atheist movement have not embraced Harris’s positions; they seek facts, not feelings.

Additionally, there is another problem that Harris has failed to understand or address. Darwinian accounts of religious beliefs and experiences

attempt to explain human behavior in terms of survival benefits or as by-products of traits favored by natural selection. Evolutionary psychologists would never use the utility of beliefs to justify their truth; in fact, the utility of such beliefs has been used as a potential argument against their actual reality. If Harris wishes for us to adopt a rigorous scientific approach to life, then invoking arguments based on the benefits of spirituality does not align with the New Atheist standard. Furthermore, how is Harris different from a religious preacher who does not justify his beliefs rationally but merely encourages others to try them out and see if they work? Harris's efforts to investigate spirituality within a secular framework illuminate the inherent limitations of New Atheism. Although he endeavors to analyze spiritual experiences without referencing God, his discussions often lack substance when divorced from belief in a higher power. He contends that spiritual experiences are a genuine reality and a fundamental human need; he warns that if atheists fail to recognize this and offer meaningful responses, they risk ceding ground to religious ideologies. While he is partially correct in asserting that spirituality is real, atheism cannot adequately address the needs of the masses, as spirituality fundamentally involves a connection to a higher power rather than merely a focus on meditation within the material realm.

Harris's attempts have proven ineffective. The search for meaning and purpose remains a fundamental aspect of the human experience, and without a comprehensive framework to address these significant needs, New Atheism continues to struggle. The movement's inability to engage thoroughly with the complexities of human experience, especially in relation to spirituality, has resulted in many of its followers seeking answers beyond its boundaries. This trend has contributed to a resurgence of interest in belief in God in the West over the past few years. This phenomenon is not unprecedented; it was bound to occur eventually.

The historical context of state atheism, particularly in the Soviet Union, further underscores the limitations of an atheistic framework imposed by authority. The Soviet regime aggressively attempted to eradicate belief in God through decades of systematic indoctrination, promoting a strictly atheistic worldview. During the Soviet era, Muslims in Central Asia endured extensive repression alongside followers of other faiths. The 1929 Law on Religious Associations led to the dissolution of Islamic courts that had previously overseen both Sharia and customary law. In 1917, there were approximately 26,000 mosques in Central Asia; by 1941, this number had dwindled to just over 1,000. By 1935, only about 60 mosques remained operational in Uzbekistan, which housed half of the region's Muslim population<sup>5</sup>. Muslim clerics were arrested and executed during Soviet purges.

Muslims showing even the most basic level of practice or identity were oppressed in Albania, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Chechnya, Dagestan, Tatarstan, and every pocket of where the dark empire of the communists reigned.

In some parts of the Caucasus, the anti-religious campaign and attacks against Islam provoked guerrilla warfare, prompting Soviet troops to suppress the uprisings<sup>6</sup>. Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan and set up a puppet regime which began to suppress Islam. Despite all these pressures, Islam did not die out; it resisted and sprang back quickly. In general religion experienced a notable resurgence across the former Soviet republics shortly after the dissolution of the USSR. Decades of state-enforced atheism gave way to a revival of faith, with many individuals reconnecting with traditional religious practices and identities. This resurgence demonstrates that efforts to suppress spirituality through state atheism are ultimately ineffective. The revival highlights the intrinsic human need for spirituality, which cannot be wholly eliminated through ideological means. Individuals inherently seek meaning and connection, and when these are denied, they inevitably gravitate back toward faith and religious expression. State atheism failed for the same reason that New Atheism is failing, it provides no solution to the human condition.

While New Atheism has faced significant criticism for its inability to provide a comprehensive sense of meaning and purpose in life, Islam offers a profound framework that not only addresses existential questions but also fosters a deeply spiritual and personal relationship with God. This fundamental difference contributes to the growing appeal of Islam in a world where many seek spiritual fulfillment amid the emptiness of secular ideologies. At the heart of Islamic belief is the assertion that the purpose of life is to worship God alone. This concept of worship transcends mere rituals; it encapsulates a holistic devotion in which ultimate love, hope, and fear are directed solely toward the Creator. As stated in the Quran:

“Those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God. Surely in the remembrance of God do hearts find comfort.”<sup>7</sup>

This verse underscores the idea that human existence is intricately tied to a divine purpose that seeks to establish a meaningful relationship with God. Such a relationship is not only foundational but transformative, offering believers inner peace and a sense of belonging that secular philosophies often fail to replicate.

In Islam, worship blooms beyond rituals—a symphony of devotion woven into the tapestry of daily life. It transforms the mundane into the sacred; a smile, a moment of gratitude, or a thoughtful reflection can become acts of reverence. Charity transcends obligation, blossoming into a profound expression of faith as believers enrich their bond with God by aiding the needy.

Nature itself calls for contemplation, revealing divine signs in its beauty. Engaging with the world—through knowledge, art, or science—becomes an act of worship. Collectively, confronting global issues like famine and climate change is also seen as an act of worship, embodying stewardship and responsibility. This communal effort emphasizes our shared duty to care for one another and the planet. At its core, worship in Islam is a journey against base desires, prioritizing spiritual values over fleeting pleasures. This struggle fosters a deep relationship with God, rooted in love, hope, fear, and reverence, where true peace and fulfillment reside.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) reminds us that positivity thinking about God is a vital form of worship, urging believers to embrace hope amidst life's challenges:

“Indeed, having good thoughts concerning God is from the perfection of the worship of God.”<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, Islamic worship is a transformative journey that shapes character and worldview, offering solace in a world often filled with anxiety and disillusionment.

Moreover, while atheism grapples with the problem of evil, Islam offers clarity. It presents life as a test, where both joy and suffering serve a divine purpose in shaping souls. As the Quran reminds us: “Every soul will taste death. And We test you, O humanity, with good and evil as a trial; then to Us, you will all be returned.”<sup>9</sup> In moments of ease, believers express gratitude, and in times of adversity, they practice patience. The narratives within the Quran guide believers, affirming that worship encompasses both the light and shadow of life, reinforcing the belief that enduring hardship with faith cultivates spiritual growth.

In the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s collapse, Islam surged forth with a vibrant resurgence, a testament to its indomitable spirit. Beneath the suffocating weight of tyranny, faith soared, revealing a profound truth: efforts to stifle belief often ignite an even fiercer devotion. In contemporary China, as Uyghur Muslims bear the brunt of state atheism’s oppression, the dormant seeds of spiritual revival lie in wait, ready to burst forth like a phoenix from the ashes. This moment echoes a powerful historical lesson:

those who seek to extinguish faith may unwittingly stoke its flames, for belief is a force that cannot be vanquished, only transformed.

In the West, following the shadows cast by the 9/11 attacks, Islam faced an unrelenting storm of media scrutiny, intellectual challenges, and societal pressures. Yet, in a remarkable twist, the backlash became a beacon, drawing more converts into its fold, while steadfast believers emerged even stronger, their faith forged and fortified by the trials they faced. This narrative echoes in Hindutva India and Zionist-occupied Palestine, where the roots of Islam dig deeper, flourishing defiantly amid chaos. Just as a resilient plant breaks through the hardest stone, faith carves its own path, thriving against the odds, a testament to its enduring power in the harshest of conditions.

Globally, the decline of New Atheism reflects a growing desire for meaning beyond materialistic confines. While atheism questions traditional beliefs, it often leaves followers with unresolved inquiries about purpose and fulfillment. In contrast, Islam provides not only answers but also fosters a vibrant community that nurtures spiritual growth and understanding.

In conclusion, the rising allure of Islam stems from its profound ability to illuminate life's deepest mysteries, cultivating an intimate connection with the Divine that brings forth peace and purpose. As the world grapples with existential doubts, the spiritual richness of Islam emerges as a steadfast beacon for the future, ready to thrive amid the fading echoes of secular ideologies yearning for significance. The once-mighty tide of New Atheism recedes into the shadows, unable to withstand the passage of time or provide the deep meaning that Islam so readily offers. Humanity yearns for something truly meaningful—a longing that can only be fulfilled by the Creator who fashioned the very void. Islam gently guides that longing, directing it toward the ultimate source of fulfillment.

Towards your Lord direct your longing!

— Quran 94:8

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