

The God Delusion: David Quinn & Richard Dawkins debate THE RYAN TUBRIDY SHOW

Now, this morning, we are asking, what's wrong with religion? That's just one of the questions raised in a new book called, *The God Delusion*. We're going to talk to its author — the man who's been dubbed the world's most famous, out of the closet, living atheist — Richard Dawkins.

Ryan Tubridy:

Richard, good morning to you

Richard Dawkins:

Good morning.

Tubridy: It's nice to talk to you again. We spoke before once on the similar subject matter. David Quinn is also with us here.

David Quinn is a columnist with the *Irish Independent*. David, a very good morning to you.



David Quinn



Ryan Tubridy



Richard Dawkins

David Quinn: Good morning.

Tubridy: So Richard Dawkins here you go again, up to your old tricks. In your most recent book, *The God Delusion*. Let's just talk about the word if you don't mind, the word delusion, so put it into context. Why did you pick that word?

Dawkins: Well the word delusion means a falsehood which is widely believed, and I think that is true of religion. It is remarkably widely believed, it's as though almost all of the population or a substantial proportion of the population believed that they had been abducted by aliens in flying saucers. You'd call that a delusion. I think God is a similar delusion.



Tubridy: And would it be fair to say you equate God with say, the imaginary friend, the bogeyman, or the fairies at the end of the garden?

Dawkins: Well I think He's just as probable to exist, yes, and I do discuss all those things especially the imaginary friend which I think is an interesting psychological phenomenon in childhood and that may possibly have something to do with the appeal of religion.

Tubridy: So take us through that little bit about the imaginary friend factor.

Dawkins: Many young children have an imaginary friend. Christopher Robin had Binker. A little girl who wrote to me had a little purple man. And the girl with the little purple man actually saw him. She seemed to hallucinate him. He appeared with a little tinkling bell. And, he was very, very real to her although in a sense she knew he wasn't real. I suspect that something like that is going on with people who claim to have heard God or seen God or hear the voice of God.

Tubridy: And we're back to delusion again. Do you think that anyone who believes in God, anyone of any religion, is deluded? Is that the bottom line with your argument Richard?

Dawkins: Well there is a sophisticated form of religion which, well one form of it is Einstein's which wasn't really a religion at all. Einstein used the word God a great deal, but he didn't mean a personal God. He didn't mean a being who could listen to your prayers or forgive your sins. He just meant it as a kind of poetic way of describing the deep unknowns, the deep uncertainties at the root of the universe. Then there are deists who believe in a kind of God, a kind of personal God who set the universe going, a sort of physicist God, but then did no more and certainly doesn't listen to your thoughts. He has no personal interest in humans at all. I don't think that I would use a word like delusions for, certainly not for Einstein, no I don't think I would for a deist either. I think I would reserve the word delusion for real theists who actually think they talk to God and think God talks to them.

Tubridy: You have a very interesting description in *The God Delusion* of the Old Testament God. Do you want to give us that description or will I give it to you back?

Dawkins: Have you got it in front of you?

Tubridy: Yes I have.

Dawkins: Well why don't you read it out then.

Tubridy: Why not. You describe God as a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.

Dawkins: That seems fair enough to me, yes.

Tubridy: Okay. There are those who would think that's a little over the top.

Dawkins: Read your Old Testament, if you think that. Just read it. Read Leviticus, read Deuteronomy, read Judges, read Numbers, read Exodus.



Tubridy: And do you, is it your contention, that these elements of the God as described by yourself are what has not helped matters in terms of, say, global religion and the wars that go with it?

Dawkins: Well, not really because no serious theologian takes the Old Testament literally anymore, so it isn't quite like that. An awful lot of people think they take the Bible literally but that can only be because they've never read it. If they ever read it they couldn't possibly take it literally, but I do think that people are a bit confused about where they get their morality from. A lot of people think they get their morality from the Bible because they can find a few good verses. Parts of the Ten Commandments are okay, parts of the Sermon on the Mount are okay. So they think they get their morality from the Bible. But actually of course nobody gets their morality from the Bible, we get it from somewhere else and to the extent that we can find good bits in the Bible we cherry pick them. We pick and choose them. We choose the good verses in the Bible and we reject the bad. Whatever criterion we use to choose the good verses and throw out the bad, that criterion is available to us anyway whether we are religious or not. Why bother to pick verses? Why not just go straight for the morality?



Tubridy: Do you think the people who believe in God and in religion generally who you think that have, you use the analogy of the imaginary friend, do you think that the people who believe in God and religion are a little bit dim?

Dawkins: No, because many of them clearly are highly educated and score highly on IQ tests and things so...

Tubridy: Why do you think they believe in something you think doesn't exist?

Dawkins: Well I think that people are sometimes remarkably adept at compartmentalizing their mind, at separating their mind into two separate parts. There are some people who even manage to combine being apparently perfectly good working scientists with believing that the book of Genesis is literally true and that the world is only 6000 years old. If you can perform that level of doublethink then you could do anything.



Tubridy: But they might say that they pity you because you don't believe in what they think is fundamentally true.

Dawkins: Well they might and we'll have to argue it out by looking at the evidence. The great thing is to argue it by looking at evidence, not just to say "Oh well, this is my faith. There's no argument to be had. You can't argue with faith."



Tubridy: David Quinn, columnist with the *Irish Independent*, show us some evidence please.

Quinn: Well I mean the first thing I would say is that Richard Dawkins is doing what he commonly does which is he's setting up straw men so he puts God in the same, he puts believing in God, in the same category as believing in fairies. Well you know children stop believing in fairies when they stop being children, but they usually don't stop believing in God because belief in God to my mind is a much more rational proposition than believing in fairies and Santa Claus.

Tubridy: Do we have more proof that God exists than we do for fairies?

Quinn: I will come to that in a second. I mean the second thing is about compartmentalizing yourself when he uses examples of... well you've got intelligent people who somehow or other also believe the world is only 6000 years old and we have a young Earth and they don't believe in evolution... but again... I mean that's too stark an either or... I mean there are many people who believe in God but also believe in evolution and believe the universe is 20 billion years old and believe fully in Darwinian evolution or whatever the case may be... Now I mean in all arguments about the existence or nonexistence of God often these things don't even get off the launch pad because the two people debating can't even agree on where the burden of proof rests. Does it rest with those who are trying to prove the existence of God or with does it rest with those who are trying to disprove the existence of God? But I suppose you know if I bring this on to Richard Dawkins' turf and we talk about the theory of evolution... The theory of evolution explains how matter — which we are all made from — organized itself into for example highly complex beings like Richard Dawkins and Ryan Tubridy and other human beings but what it doesn't explain just to give one example is how matter came into being in the first place. That, in scientific terms, is a question that cannot be answered and can only be answered, if it can be answered fully at all, by philosophers and theologians. But it certainly cannot be answered by science and the question of whether God exists or not cannot be answered fully by science either and a common mistake that people can believe is the scientist who speaks about evolution with all the authority of science can also speak about the existence of God with all the authority of science and of course he can't. The scientist speaking about the existence of God is actually engaging in philosophy or theology but he certainly isn't bringing to it the authority of science *per se*.

Tubridy: Back to the original question, have you any evidence for me?

Quinn: Well I will say the existence of matter itself. I will say the existence of morality. Myself and Richard Dawkins have a clearly different understanding of the origins of morality. I would say free will. If you're an atheist, if you're an atheist logically speaking you cannot believe in objective morality. You cannot believe in free will. These are two things that the vast majority of humankind implicitly believe in. We believe for example that if a person carries out a bad action, we can call that person bad because we believe that they are freely choosing those actions. ... And just quickly an atheist believes we are controlled completely by our genes and make no free actions at all.

Tubridy: What evidence do you have, Richard Dawkins, that you're right?

Dawkins: I certainly don't believe a word of that. I do not believe we are controlled wholly by our genes. Let me go back to the really important thing that Mr. Quinn said.

Quinn: How are we independent of our genes by your reckoning? What allows us to be independent of our genes? Where is this coming from?

Dawkins: Environment for a start.

Quinn: Well hang on but that also is a product of if you like of matter. Okay?

Dawkins: Yes but it's not genes.

Quinn: What part of us allows us to have free will?

Dawkins: Free will is a very difficult philosophical question and it's not one that has anything to do with religion, contrary to what Mr. Quinn says...but...

Quinn: It has an awful lot to do with religion because if there is no God there's no free will because we are completely phenomena of matter.

Dawkins: Who says there's not free will if there is no God? That's a ridiculous thing to say.

Quinn: William Provine for one who you quote in your book. I mean I have a quote here from him. "Other scientists, as well, believe the same thing... that everything that goes on in our heads is a product of genes and as you say environment and chemical reactions. That there is no room for free will." And Richard if you haven't got to grips with that you seriously need to because many of your colleagues have and they deny outright the existence of free will and they are hardened materialists like yourself.



Tubridy: Okay. Richard Dawkins, rebut to that as you wish.

Dawkins: I'm not interested in free will what I am interested in is the ridiculous suggestion that if science can't say where the origin of matter comes from theology can. The origin of matter... the origin of the whole universe, is a very, very difficult question. It's one that scientists are working on. It's one that they hope eventually to solve. Just as before Darwin, biology was a mystery. Darwin solved that. Now cosmology is a mystery. The origin of the universe is a mystery; it's a mystery to everyone. Physicists are working on it. They have theories. But if science can't answer that question then as sure as hell theology can't either.

Quinn: If I can come in there, it is a perfectly reasonable proposition to ask yourself where does matter come from? And it is perfectly reasonable as well to posit the answer, God created matter. Many reasonable people believe this and by the way... I mean look it is quite a different category to say look we will study matter and we will ask how

Dawkins: But if science can't answer that question, then it's sure as hell theology can't either.

Tubridy: Richard, if ...

Quinn: Sorry — if I can come in there — It's a perfectly reasonable proposition to ask oneself where does matter come from. And it's perfectly reasonable as well to posit the answer God created matter. Many reasonable people believe this.

Dawkins: It's not reasonable.

Quinn: It's quite a different category to say "Look, we will study matter and we will ask how matter organizes itself into particular forms," and come up with the answer "evolution." It is quite another question to ask "Where does matter come from to begin with?" And if you like you must go outside of matter to answer that question. And then you're into philosophical categories.

Dawkins: How could it possibly be another category and be allowed to say God did it since you can't explain where God came from?

Quinn: Because you must have an uncaused cause for anything at all to exist. Now, I see in your book you come up with an argument against this that I frankly find to be bogus. You come up with the idea of a mathematical infinite regress but this does not apply to the argument of uncaused causes and unmoved movers because we are not talking about maths we're talking about existence and existentially nothing exists unless you have an uncaused cause. And that uncaused cause and that unmoved mover is, by definition, God.



Tubridy: OK. I'm going to move...

Dawkins: You just defined God as that! You just defined a problematic existence. That's no solution to the problem. You just evaded it.

Quinn: You can't answer the question where matter comes from! You, as an atheist —

Dawkins: I can't, but science is working on it. You can't answer it either.

Quinn: It won't come up with an answer, and you invoked a mystery argument that you accuse religious believers of doing all the time. You invoke a very first and most fundamental question about reality. You do not know where matter came from.

Dawkins: I don't know. Science is working on it. Science is a progressive thing that's working on it. You don't know but you claim that you do.

Quinn: I claim to know the probable answer.



Tubridy: Can I suggest that the next question is quite appropriate. The role of religion in wars. When you think of the difficulty that it brings up on a local level. Richard Dawkins, do you believe the world would be a safer place without religion?

Dawkins: Yes, I do. I don't think that religion is the only cause of wars. Very far from it. Neither the second World War nor the first World War were caused by religion, but I do think that religion is a major exacerbator, and especially in the world today, as a matter of fact.



Tubridy: OK. Explain yourself.

Dawkins: Well, it's pretty obvious. I mean that if you look at the Middle East, if you look at India and Pakistan, if you look at Northern Ireland, there are many, many places where the only basis for hostility that exists between rival factions who kill each other is religion.



Tubridy: Why do you take it upon yourself to preach, if you like, atheism and there's an interesting choice of words in some ways — that you've been accused of being something like a fundamental atheist. If you like, the "High Priest" of atheism. Why go about your business in such a way that that's kind of ...trying to disprove these things. Why don't you just believe in it privately, for example?

Dawkins: Well, fundamentalist is not quite the right word. A fundamentalist is one who believes in a holy book and thinks that everything in that holy book is true. I am passionate about what I believe because I think there's evidence for it. And I think it's very different being passionate about evidence from being passionate about a holy book. So I do it because I care passionately about the truth. I really, really believe it's a big question. It's an important question, whether there is a God at the root of the universe. I think it's a question that matters, and I think that we need to discuss it, and that's what I do.

Quinn: Ryan if I could just say...

Tubridy: Go ahead.

Quinn: Richard has come up with a definition of fundamentalism that obviously suits him. He thinks a fundamentalist has to be somebody who believes in a holy book. A fundamentalist is somebody who firmly believes that they have got the truth and holds that to an extreme extent and become intolerant of those who hold to a different truth. And Richard Dawkins has just outlined what he thinks the truth to be and that makes him intolerant of those who have religious beliefs.

Now, in terms of the effect of religion upon the world, I mean, at least Richard has rightly acknowledged that there are many causes of war and strife and ill will in the world, and he mentions World War I and World War II. In his book he tries to get Nietzsche off the hook of having atheism blamed for example, the atrocities carried out by Josef Stalin, and saying that these have nothing particularly to do with atheism.

But Stalin and many Communists who were explicitly atheistic took the view that religion was precisely the sort of malign and evil force that Richard Dawkins thinks it is. And they set out from that premise to, if you like, inflict upon religion sort of their own version of a "final solution." They set to eradicate from the earth true violence and also true education that was explicitly anti-religious. And under the Soviet Union, and in China, and under Pol Pot in Cambodia explicit and violent efforts were made to suppress religion on the grounds that religion was a wicked force; and we have the truth, and our truth would not admit religion into the picture at all because we believe religion to be an untruth. So atheism also can lead to fundamentalist violence and did so in the last century. And atheists...



Tubridy: We'll allow Richard in there.

Dawkins: Stalin was a very, very bad man and his persecution of religion was a very, very bad thing. End of story. It's nothing to do with the fact that he was an atheist. We can't just compile lists of bad people who were atheists and lists of bad people who were religious. I am afraid there were plenty on both sides.

Quinn: Yes, but Richard you are always compiling lists of bad religious people. I mean you do it continually in all your books, and then you devote a paragraph to basically trying to absolve atheism of all blame for any atrocity throughout history. You cannot have it both ways! You cannot...

Dawkins: I deny that.

Quinn: But of course you do it. Every time you are on a program talking about religion, you bring up the atrocities committed in the name of religion. And then you try to minimize the atrocities committed by atheists because they were so anti-religious and because they regarded it as a malign force in much the same way you do. You are trying to have it both ways.

Dawkins: Well, I simply deny that. I do think that there is some evil in faith because faith is belief in something without evidence.

Quinn: But, you see, that is not what faith is. You see, that is a caricature and a straw man and is so typical. That is not what faith is! You have faith that God doesn't...

Dawkins: What is faith? What is faith!?

Quinn: Wait a second! You have faith that doesn't exist. You are a man of faith as well.

Dawkins: I do not! I have looked at the evidence!

Quinn: Well, I have looked — I have looked at the evidence too!

Dawkins: If somebody comes up with evidence that goes the other way, I will be the first to change my mind.

Quinn: Well, I think the very existence of matter is evidence that God exists. And by the way, remember, you are the man who has problems believing in free will, which you try to, very conveniently, shunt to one side.

Dawkins: I'm just not interested in free will. It's not a big question for me.

Quinn: It's a vast question because we cannot be considered morally responsible beings unless we have free will. We do everything because we are controlled by our genes or our environment. It's a vital question.



Tubridy: We are returning to the point at which we kind of pretty much began, which is probably an appropriate time to end the debate. Richard Dawkins, good to talk to you again. Thank you for your time. And to you, David Quinn, columnist at *The Irish Independent*, thank you very much indeed for that. *The God Delusion*, by the way, throws up many, many interesting questions. It's written by Richard Dawkins and is published by Bantam Press. We'll put details, as always on our website, www.rte.ie If you want to exercise your free will to contact us, please do so.



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Ryan Tubridy (born 28 May 1974) is a television and radio presenter on Radio Telefís Éireann in Ireland. Tubridy started his radio career at the age of 12 reviewing books for the popular Radio 1 show "Poporama" presented by Ruth Buchanan. From 2002 until 2005 he presented RTÉ 2 fm's hugely popular morning show, *The Full Irish*. In 2006 he presents *The Tubridy Show*, weekday mornings on Radio 1.

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Richard Dawkins was educated at Oxford University and has taught zoology at the universities of California and Oxford. He is the Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University. His books about evolution and science include *The Selfish Gene*, *The Extended Phenotype*, *The Blind Watchmaker*, *River Out of Eden*, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, *Unweaving the Rainbow*, and, most recently, *The God Delusion*.

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