

**THERE'S PROBABLY NO GOD.
NOW STOP WORRYING AND ENJOY YOUR LIFE.**

New atheism

Are atheism's arguments valid or is it just another cult? This poster will help you revise the key arguments

Edexcel A2 Unit 3: Religious Studies — Development
AQA A2 Unit 3F: Religion and Contemporary Society
WJEC RS1/2: Introduction to Religion in Contemporary Society

1 New atheist reaction to 9/11

Many of us saw religion as harmless nonsense. Beliefs might lack all supporting evidence but, we thought, if people needed a crutch for consolation, where's the harm? September 11th changed all that.

Richard Dawkins

2 New atheism = anti-theism

- The arguments for the existence/non-existence of God are no longer of interest.
- There is no evidence for the existence of God.
- Religion = belief in God.
- Explanations for the origins of religion confirm that it derives entirely from social and psychological needs.
- Religion breeds extremism, violence and ignorance.

3 The Brights

- Naturalistic worldview, free of supernatural and mystical elements.
- New criticisms?
- Attempts to spread new atheist message through:
 - books/debates/TV
 - websites/blogs
 - meetings/meetups
- Message criticised for being arrogant, distorting and extreme.
- Membership did not grow as fast as anticipated.

4 Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* (2006)

- Declares God is a delusion and religion dangerous and outdated.
- Delusion = not grounded in evidence; flies in the face of evidence; 'A process of non-thinking'.
- Faith is infantile, parallel to belief in Santa Claus.
- Arguments for the existence of God are failures.
- The existence of God is extremely improbable, but is still used to fill gaps in knowledge — 'the God of the gaps'.

5 Viruses and memes

- Ideas introduced by Dawkins in the 1990s.
- Religion is a mental virus that spreads from generation to generation and between populations and affects healthy minds.
- Memes (Dawkins' term) are like genes, but rather than replicating biological information, they replicate cultural information.
- Play a smaller role in *The God Delusion*.

6 The Root of all Evil?

Television programme accompanying *The God Delusion*, associating the following concepts with religion:

- Religion is morally bankrupt and encourages a warped morality.
- Child abuse, segregation and mis-education.
- Psychologically damaging.
- Mixed messages — e.g. AIDS as 'the wages of sin'.
- Blind obedience to irrational and immoral teachings or intuitions.

7 God in the dock

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction.... A vindictive bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser, a misogynistic, homophobic racist, an infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential...capriciously malevolent bully.

The God Delusion

- Everyone in the dock: Abraham, Moses, a galaxy of characters in the Book of Judges.
- The death of Jesus: 'Paul's tortuously nasty sado-masochistic doctrine of Atonement' (*The God Delusion*).

8 Challenges to Dawkins

Dawkins exhibits all the hallmarks of those forms of religion he so despises: vehemence, narrow-mindedness and intolerance. He is a 'Fundamentalist' of the scientific kind.

Tinker, M. (2006) 'Dawkins' Dilemmas', *The Briefing*, No. 337

Why in God's name, do we take this silly, shallow scientist seriously? An arch simplifier, a hurler of unnecessary insults. By saying that he won't believe anything that can't be provided in a science lesson, Richard Dawkins lines himself up with the more nerdish sort of first year philosophy students and leaflet distributors at Hyde Park Corner.

A. N. Wilson

9 Alister McGrath's *The Dawkins Delusion* (2007)

States that belief in God is not like belief in Santa Claus, otherwise there would be adults who believed in Santa Claus beyond childhood. Belief in Santa Claus does not develop in adulthood — belief in God frequently does.

According to McGrath, Dawkins:

- presents the 'pathological as if it were normal, the fringe as if it were the centre, crackpots as if they were mainstream'
- does not understand the purpose of classic arguments for the existence of God. They are not a priori proofs of faith, but a posteriori demonstrations of the coherence of faith
- stresses the improbability of human existence — 'We are grotesquely lucky to be here.' However, we are here, so his argument that God is extremely improbable suggests that the question is whether God too is *actual*
- assumes that believers fill the gaps in scientific knowledge with God to dodge incomprehensibility. McGrath suggests that it is the comprehensibility of scientific explanations which demands a further explanation
- assumes an outdated warfare model of the relationship between science and religion
- offers a simplistic naturalistic explanation of the origin of religion emphasising a psychological explanation of religious belief
- has a concept of the meme that is not supported within the scientific community. It is 'conceptually redundant', untestable and hypothetical
- claims that atheists would never be guilty of violence against religion. McGrath cites several examples of significant historical episodes which counter this claim
- provides examples of warped religious morality that are 'straw men' — obviously extreme but not representative

ReligiousStudiesReviewOnline

Go online (see back cover) for revision resources, links and further information to help you understand this controversial topic.