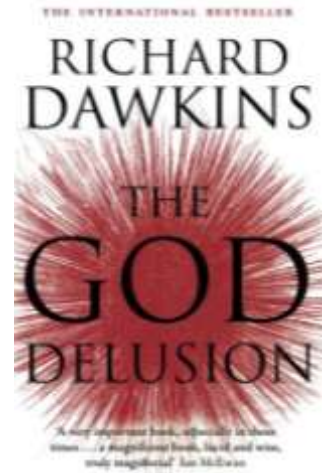
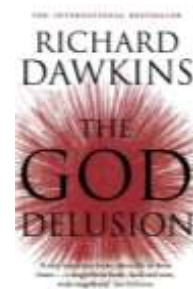


Who's deluded, Professor Dawkins?

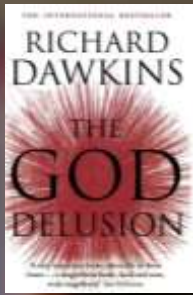
A Real Issues service
6.30pm, 29 June 2008^{AD}



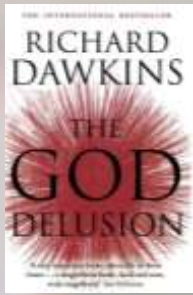


The God Delusion

- Introduction
- Three Questions:
 - What does Dawkins say about God?
 - What does God say to Dawkins?
 - What should we say about God to Dawkins?
 - Or rather, what should we say to our friends who have been influenced by Dawkins' ideas?
- Conclusion

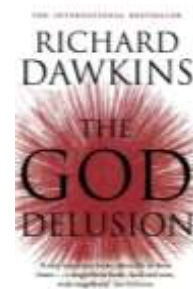


Professor Richard Dawkins



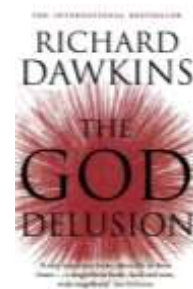
- Professor for the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University
- An evolutionary biologist
- The author of numerous works, including *The Selfish Gene*, *The Blind Watchmaker*, (revealingly) *A Devil's Chaplain* and now *The God Delusion*
- A passionate atheist with a zeal for converts!

Professor Richard Dawkins



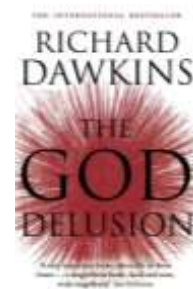
Introduction

- He has a dream:
 - “Imagine, with John Lennon, a world with no religion. Imagine no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusade, no witch-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Indian partition ... no shiny-suited bouffant-haired televangelists fleecing gullible people of their money ...” (p23-24)
- He has a mission:
 - “If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down.” (p28)



Introduction

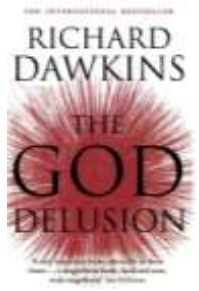
- Some definitions:
 - Atheist:
 - “A person who denies or disbelieves the existence of God or gods.” (NSOED)
 - Contrast an agnostic:
 - “A person who holds the view that nothing can be known of the existence of God or of anything beyond material phenomena.” (NSOED)



Introduction

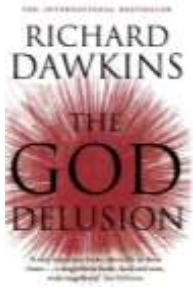
- *The God Delusion* is a controversial 1.5 million selling defence of atheism:
- Lauded by many atheists:
 - “This is my favourite book of all time. ... It is a heroic and life-changing work.” (Derren Brown, quoted on *The God Delusion* cover)
- Lamented by many others:
 - “*The God Delusion* makes me embarrassed to be an atheist.” (Professor Michael Ruse)

What does Dawkins say about God?



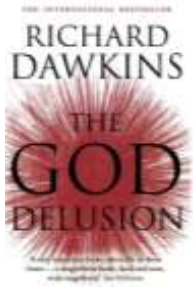
- In theory, Dawkins is even handed:
 - “I have no hatred of Christians, I hate all religions.” (media interview)
 - “I am not attacking any particular version of God or gods. I am attacking God, all gods, anything and everything supernatural ...” (p57)
- In reality, his focus narrows to Christianity
 - “... but only because it is the version with which I happen to be most familiar.” (p58)
 - And against which he is most vitriolic:

What does Dawkins say about God?



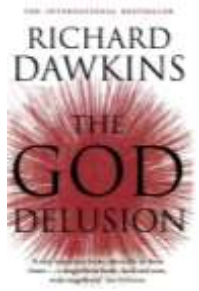
- “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” (p51)
- In a number of passages, Dawkins reveals an intense, personal animosity towards the God he thinks does not exist!

What does Dawkins say about God?



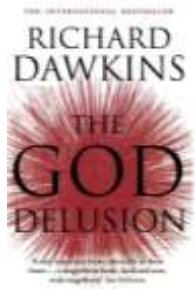
- Five selected arguments against God and religion in *The God Delusion*:
 - Atheism represents “higher consciousness”
 - Science and religion are locked in mortal combat
 - “God” would have to have been created
 - Religion is inherently evil
 - The Bible is immoral

What does Dawkins say about God?



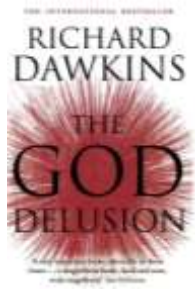
- Atheism represents a “higher consciousness”
 - Dawkins intends his book to “raise consciousness” about atheism and its entailments:
 - “This book ... is intended to raise consciousness ... to the fact that to be an atheist is a realistic aspiration, and a brave and splendid one.” (p23)
 - “Being an atheist is nothing to be apologetic about. On the contrary, it is something to be proud of, standing tall to face the far horizon, for atheism nearly always indicates a healthy independence of mind and, indeed, a healthy mind.” (p26)

What does Dawkins say about God?



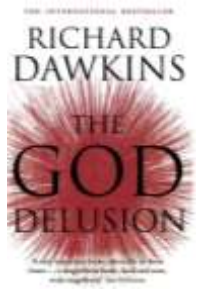
- He commends “an American initiative to rebrand atheists as “Brights” in the same way as homosexuals successfully rebranded themselves as ‘gays’” (p380)
- Dawkins sees atheism as “salvation”
 - By implication, those of us who are not atheists are foolish, cowardly slaves with darkened, unhealthy minds. According to the book title, we are delusional.
 - “When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion it is called Religion.” (p28, quoting with approval RM Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*)

What does Dawkins say about God?



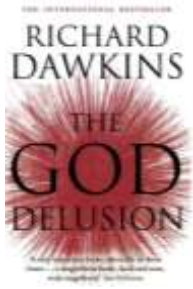
- Science and religion are in mortal combat
 - Darwinian evolution is true, liberating and supreme:
 - “I am no more fundamentalist when I say evolution is true than when I say it is true that New Zealand is in the southern hemisphere.” (p320)
 - “Darwinism is the story of humanity’s liberation from the delusion that its destiny is controlled by a power higher than itself.” (p27)
 - “Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection – the ultimate scientific consciousness-raiser.” (p142)

What does Dawkins say about God?



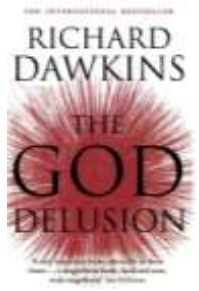
- Evolution removes the necessity of God
 - “Natural selection not only explains the whole of life; it also raises our consciousness to the power of science to explain how organized complexity can emerge from simple beginnings without any deliberate guidance.” (p141)
 - “Sire, I had no need of that hypothesis” (Laplace’s explanation to Napoleon of his omission of God in an account of the movement of the planets; p68^{fn})

What does Dawkins say about God?



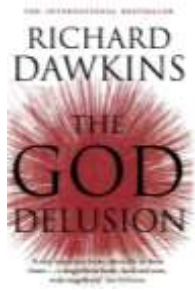
- Evolution removes the possibility of God
 - “Design ... raises an even bigger problem than it solves: who designed the designer?” (p147)
 - “God disappeared in a puff of logic.” (Douglas Adams, *Hitchiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*)
 - (since God requires faith and faith requires the absence of proof and the existence of the babelfish provides proof).

What does Dawkins say about God?



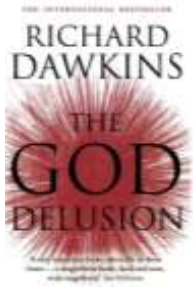
- Dawkins rejects any attempt to allow science and religion to complement each other.
- In particular, the proposal of Stephen Jay Gould:
 - “The net of science covers the empirical universe: what is it made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The net of religion extends over questions of moral meaning and value. ... [Scientists] get the age of rocks, and religion retains the rock of ages; we study how the heavens go, and they determine how to go to heaven.”
- “I simply do not believe that Gould could possibly have meant much of what he wrote in *Rocks of Ages*.” (p81)

What does Dawkins say about God?



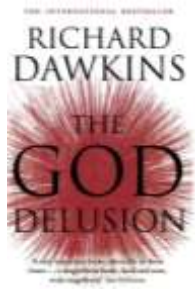
- “God” would have to have been created
 - Dawkins’ ultimate argument: “Who designed the designer?”
 - “Evolution is true. Evolution explains the illusion of design. The design argument is the main argument for God. Therefore there is no God.” (Robertson summarising Dawkins, p65-6)
 - “The designer God cannot be used to explain organized complexity because any God capable of designing anything would have to be complex enough to demand the same kind of explanation in his own right.” (p136)
 - Six year olds put it more simply: “Who made God?”

What does Dawkins say about God?



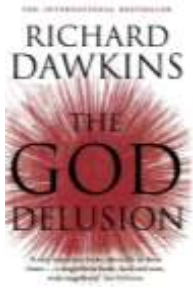
- Religion is inherently evil
 - “The root of all evil?” was the title of Dawkins’ 2006 Channel 4 series against religion.
 - This evil is seen in various ways:
 - It impedes the advance of science
 - It opposes homosexuality and abortion
 - It endangers its opponents
 - Supremely, suicide bombings: The God Delusion is itself an example of the many anti-religious books to have been provoked by “9/11”

What does Dawkins say about God?



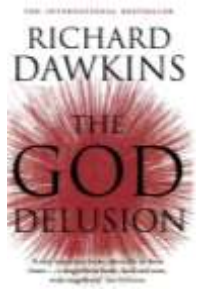
- It infects and abuses children
 - Religion is (probably) a childhood virus:
 - “the child brain is ... vulnerable to infection by mental ‘viruses’ ... [manifested] ... as religion ... Once infected, the child will grow up and infect the next generation with the same nonsense.” (p219)
 - Religion is (certainly) child abuse:
 - “we should no more allow parents to teach their children to believe, for example, in the literal truth of the Bible ... than we should allow parents to knock their children’s teeth out or lock them in a dungeon.” (p367, quoting Nicholas Humphrey with approval)

What does Dawkins say about God?



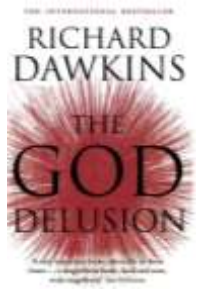
- The Bible is immoral
 - Whether “by direct instruction” or “by example”, the Bible “[encourages] a system of morals which any civilised modern person, whether religious or not, would find ... obnoxious” (p268)
 - Three examples: Lot’s “hospitality”, Jesus’ teaching and Jesus’ death

What does Dawkins say about God?



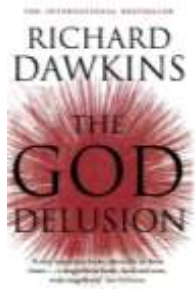
- Lot's "hospitality" is immoral
 - His "halo is tarnished" (p272) by the way he responds to his fellow Sodomites:
 - "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof." (Genesis 19.7-8)

What does Dawkins say about God?



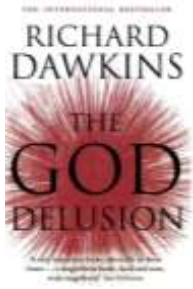
- Jesus' teaching is immoral
 - “‘Love thy neighbour’ didn’t mean what we now think it means. It meant only ‘Love another Jew.’ ... Jesus was a devotee of ... in-group morality – coupled with out-group hostility ... It was Paul who invented the idea of taking the Jewish God to the Gentiles. Hartung puts it more bluntly than I dare: ‘Jesus would have turned over in his grave if he had known that Paul would be taking his plan to the pigs.’” (p287, 292)

What does Dawkins say about God?



- Jesus' death is immoral
 - "This teaching, which lies at the heart of New Testament theology, is almost as morally obnoxious as the story of Abraham setting out to barbecue Isaac, which it resembles ... a new injustice, topped off by a new sadomasochism ... God incarnated himself as a man, Jesus, in order that he should be tortured and executed in atonement for the hereditary sin of Adam. Ever since Paul expounded this repellent doctrine, Jesus has been worshipped as the redeemer of all our sins. Not just the past sin of Adam: future sins as well ... We should also dismiss it as barking mad, but for its ubiquitous familiarity which has dulled our objectivity." (p284-7)

What does God say to Dawkins?



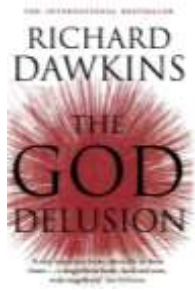
- My creation testifies eloquently to my reality!



what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made,

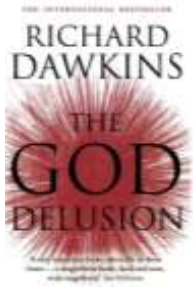
(Romans 1.18-21)

What does God say to Dawkins?



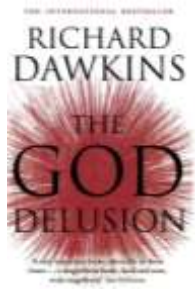
- But you have stifled this truth by your sin.
 - *“¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”* (Romans 1.18-21)

What does God say to Dawkins?



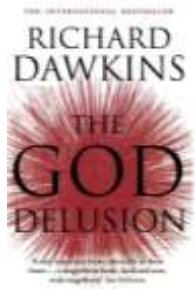
- Although creation speaks ...
 - “¹ The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. ² Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge” (Psalm 19.1-2)
- ... you can't hear what it says
 - “There is no speech nor language; their voice cannot be heard.” (Psalm 19.3, RV)
- Notice: Your sin renders your reasoning untrustworthy, and your perception faulty
 - “their **thinking** became futile and their **foolish hearts** were darkened”

What does God say to Dawkins?



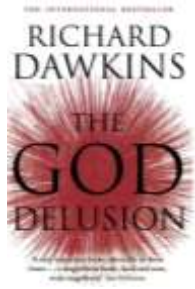
- Yet creation continues to testify to me:
 - “¹⁶ In the past, he let all nations go their own way.
¹⁷ Yet he has not left himself without testimony:
He has shown kindness by giving you rain from
heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides
you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with
joy.” (Acts 14.17)

What does God say to Dawkins?



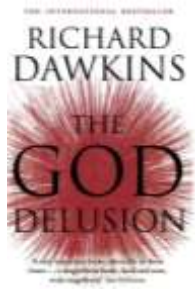
- And supremely in my Son, I have spoken:
 - “... in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.” (Hebrews 1.2)
- Indeed, in him, I have come personally:
 - “¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1.1, 14)

What does God say to Dawkins?



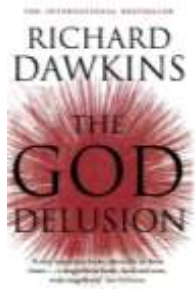
- And I have sent my Son and his message for your salvation:
 - “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” (Romans 1.17)
 - “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3.16)

What does God say to Dawkins?



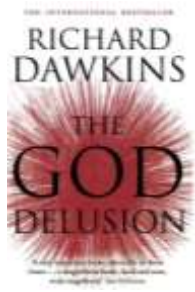
- So trust him – and live, for
 - “⁴² ... he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”
- The alternative is to remain foolish, and under judgement for your sin:
 - “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. ...” (Psalm 14.1)

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



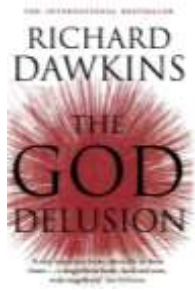
- Or rather, what should we say to our friends who have been influenced by Dawkins?
- We consider brief responses to the five selected arguments against God and religion we considered from *The God Delusion*:
 - Atheism represents “higher consciousness”
 - Science and religion are locked in mortal combat
 - “God” would have to have been created
 - Religion is inherently evil
 - The Bible is immoral

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



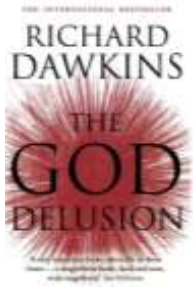
- Is atheism a “higher consciousness”?
 - Far from it: it is the ultimate foolishness, and a merely temporary conviction.
 - Atheist tombstone: “Here lies an atheist, all dressed up but with nowhere to go.” CS Lewis’ comment: “I bet he wishes that were so.”
 - Here is true wisdom:
 - “‘Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?’ declares the LORD. ‘This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.’ (Isaiah 66.2)
 - Is that a bare assertion? So is Dawkins’s claim!

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



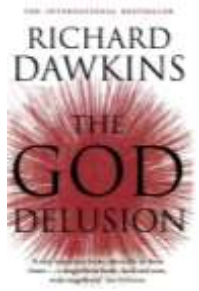
- Are science and religion natural enemies?
 - Scientists don't all seem to think so!
 - A recent survey of religious belief among American scientists showed that 40% had a personal faith in a personal God – exactly the same proportion as a century ago.
 - Not all atheists think so:
 - "... science simply cannot (by its legitimate methods) adjudicate the issue of God's possible superintendence of nature. We neither affirm nor deny it; we simply can't comment on it as scientists. ..." (Stephen Jay Gould)

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



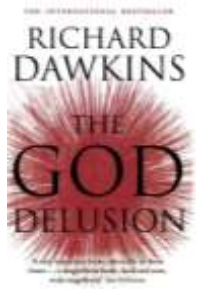
- Historically, it was *precisely* the Christian worldview that gave birth to modern science.
- ‘God the creator and law-giver acted as guarantor of the of the consistency of the properties of his creation. Since scientific knowledge was rooted in God’s faithfulness in creation, and human observers were gifted by God with reason and curiosity, it was viewed as reliable knowledge.’ (Dr Denis Alexander)

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



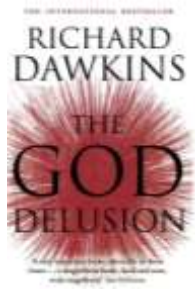
- Biblically, we find Solomon the scientist, 3000 years ago:
 - 'I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw' (Prov. 24.32)
 - '[Solomon] described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish.' (1 Kings 4.33)

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



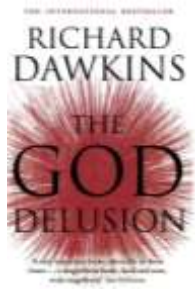
- At the Reformation, science was viewed as a gift of God:
 - “Whenever we come upon these matters in secular writers, let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God’s excellent gifts. ... Those men whom Scripture calls ‘natural men’ were, indeed, sharp and penetrating in their investigation of inferior things. Let us, accordingly, learn by their example how many gifts the Lord left to human nature even after it was despoiled of its true good.” (John Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.15)
 - So: give thanks to God for Dawkins the scientist!

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



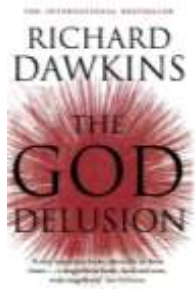
- Wouldn't "God" need to have been created?
 - Dawkins' central argument ...
 - "Who designed the designer?"
 - ... rests on two key assumptions
 - both are drawn from the theory of Darwinian evolution by natural selection, namely:
 - Everything comes from something
 - Therefore the designer needs a designer ...
 - Complex things evolve from simpler ones
 - Therefore the designer's designer must be "simple", and thus not the intelligent, Almighty Creator.

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



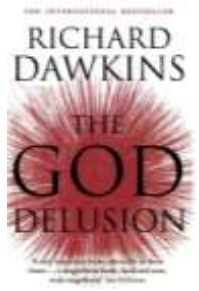
- But even if Darwinian evolution explains biological life, biology is not everything:
 - “Dawkins is methodologically confused, taking a principle of biological science and making it into a universal principle.” (Joe Fitzpatrick, quoted in Robertson, p67)
- Ironically, Dawkins concedes this limitation and laments the lack of an equivalent model in physics:
 - “We don’t yet have an equivalent crane [explanatory device] for physics. Some kind of multiverse theory could in principle do for physics the same explanatory work as Darwinism does for biology ...” (p188)

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



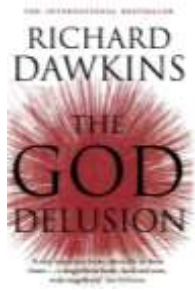
- (Multiverses are entirely speculative, and a little odd: “In some of those universes I am already dead. In a small minority of them, you have a green moustache,” p409)
- By insisting that “God” conform to a Darwinian model, he makes the “Creator” a biological being.
 - In other words, Dawkins successfully disproves the existence of a created, physical “God” ...
 - ... whom Christians don’t believe in either!
- Rather, “God is spirit” (John 4.24); he is the “eternal God” (Romans 16.26), and he is “the source of all life” (1 Timothy 6.13, NJB).

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



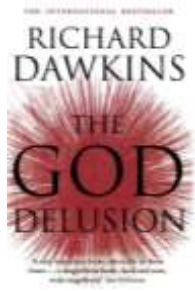
- Is religion inherently evil?
 - Many evil things are done in the name of religion.
 - Just as not all science is good science ...
 - Witness, for example, the eugenics research in Nazi Germany.
 - ... so not all religion is true religion
 - But the practice of false and evil religion does not disprove the existence of the true and living God!

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



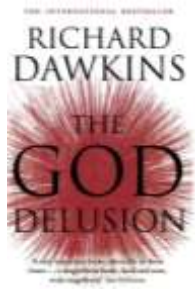
- Biblically, the reality of God and the practice of religion frequently **don't** coincide.
 - “¹⁶ Paul ... *was greatly distressed* to see that the city was full of idols. ... ²² Paul ... stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: ‘Men of Athens! I see that in every way *you are very religious.*’” (Acts 17.16, 22)
 - “²¹ I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. ... ²³ Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.” (Amos 5.21, 23)
 - Religion is often evidence of our rebellion, not our spirituality.

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



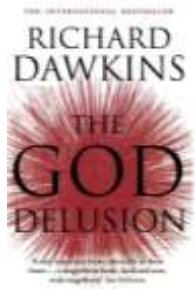
- The gospel calls us to trust God's word, not our religious efforts ...
 - "... get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you." (James 1.21)
- ... and only then to test the reality of our faith:
 - "²⁶ If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (James 1.26-27)

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



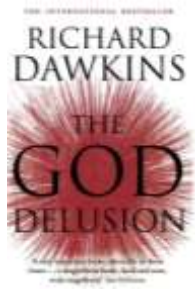
- A much stronger case can be made that atheism is inherently evil:
 - Dawkins contends:
 - “What matters is not whether Hitler and Stalin were atheists, but whether atheism systematically influences people to do bad things. There is not the smallest evidence that it does.” (p309)
 - Really?
 - Both Russian Communism and German Fascism had their philosophical roots in Friedrich “God is dead” Nietzsche:
 - “I call Christianity the one great curse ... for which no expedient is sufficiently poisonous ...”

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



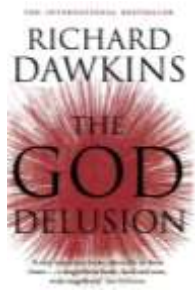
- McGrath observes:
 - “In their efforts to enforce their atheistic ideology, the Soviet authorities systematically destroyed and eliminated the vast majority of churches and priests during the period 1918-41”
- Hitler’s personal secretary wrote:
 - “The laws of nature were [Hitler’s] religion. He could reconcile his dogma of violence better with nature than with the Christian doctrine of loving your neighbour and your enemy. ... In nature the law of the struggle for survival has reigned from the first. ... [The] church have made it their aim to keep alive the weak, those unfit live” (Robertson, p111)
- “Not the smallest evidence?”

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



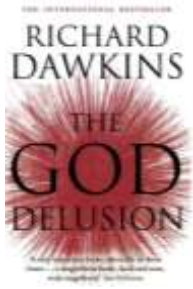
- Is the Bible immoral?
 - Dawkins delights in his ignorance of theology (eg, p14-15).
 - One reviewer wrote, “Imagine someone holding forth on biology whose only knowledge of the subject is the *British Book of Birds*, and you have a rough idea of what it feels like to read Richard Dawkins on theology”
 - It shows!
 - He constantly quotes radical theologians and extreme fundamentalists in analysing “Christianity”
 - He is (wilfully?) ignorant of mainstream Christian theology

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



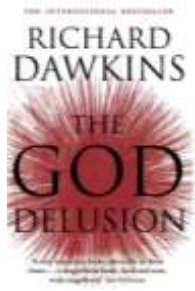
- He berates Christians at one point as those,
 - “who take the Bible very seriously indeed as a literal and accurate record of history and hence as evidence supporting their religious beliefs. Do these people never open the book that they believe is the literal truth?” (p120)
- Even without sharing our faith, one might have hoped that an Oxford Professor writing a bestseller on religion, focussing on Christianity, would at least read the Bible carefully.
 - One example: he says that it is Luke’s gospel which records the visit of the Magi (p261). He takes this as evidence of Luke’s anti-factual agenda. It is, of course, Matthew who records the visit of the Magi – which radically undermines the point that Dawkins is trying to make!

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



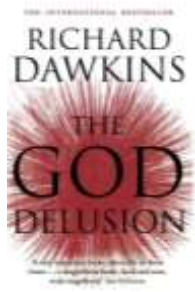
- Consider his three examples:
 - Of the three, one Dawkins misunderstands, one he misrepresents and one he simply rejects as an arrogant sinner.
 - Lot's "hospitality"
 - Often, biblical characters evidence God's grace rather than modelling godliness.
 - John Calvin (hardly a liberal!) says of Lot:
 - He "should rather have endured a thousand deaths, than have resorted to such a measure." (Comm. on Genesis 19.8)

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



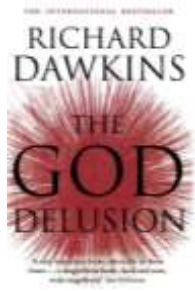
- Jesus' teaching is immoral?
 - Dawkins argues that when Jesus taught "love thy neighbour" he meant only "love other Jews"
 - Hasn't he read the parable of the Good Samaritan?
 - On page 386, he quotes the second half of Matthew 5.45:
 - "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."
 - Can he really not have read Matthew 5.44-5?
 - "44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



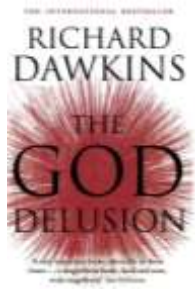
- Jesus' death is immoral?
 - There is a better explanation for his hatred of the cross:
 - “¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’ ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ... ²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”
 - The reason for the cross? “so that no-one may boast before him.” (v29)

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



- If we were to meet Richard Dawkins, there is not much chance of changing his mind:
 - “Dawkins simply offers the atheist equivalent of slick hellfire preaching, substituting turbocharged rhetoric and highly selective manipulation of facts for careful, evidence-based thinking” (McGrath, p x)
- But if we meet an atheist or agnostic, there is much we can say:
 - Our faith is not “a persistently false belief held in the face of strong contradictory evidence” (p28)
 - We have a reasonable faith – worth investigating.

What should we say about God to Dawkins?



- 'For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that **Christ died** for our sins according to the Scriptures, that **he was buried**, that **he was raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that **he appeared** to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, **he appeared** to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time ... and last of all **he appeared** to me also, as to one abnormally born.' (1 Cor. 15.5ff)
- Christian faith is a rational decision to trust Jesus Christ based on the evidence of those who saw, heard, touched and testified.

Two helpful books ...

