

LOGICAL ERRORS IN FOUR ATHEIST AUTHORS: HITCHENS, DAWKINS, HARRIS, DENNETT

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This is a catalogue of some of the representative errors of basic logic found in Hitchens' *god Is Not Great*, Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, Harris' *The End of Faith* and Dennett's *Breaking the Spell*.

Many of these errors are committed over and over again and it would be too tiresome for all concerned to catalogue each instance of each logical error, though this would not be difficult to do.

It needs to be noted that the existence of these errors – shockingly numerous as they are – do NOT prove God exists, or that any particular religion is true. What this catalogue shows is that if they want to make credible arguments, atheists must do better than Hitchens, Dawkins, Harris or Dennett. As presented, their arguments are too riddled with logical errors and irrationalities to be trustworthy and convincing. If they are the best atheism has to offer, then atheism has a dim future among thinking people.

I. GOD IS NOT GREAT by Christopher Hitchens

Note: I will leave Biblical scholars to deal with Hitchens' errors in regards to Biblical issues. By showing his logical errors, I can only show that Hitchens' reasoning is not to be trusted

1: much of this book is an *extended non sequitur*: proving that God does not exist is logically distinct from God's nature, i.e. God may be evil but He may exist nonetheless.

2: It is also a **category mistake**, i.e. confusing the category of existence with the category of ethics. Goodness or badness cannot prove that something does or does not exist.

3: "It must seek to interfere with the lives of nonbelievers or heretics or adherents of other faiths." (p. 17): Besides being an error of fact, this is **non-sequitur**: it does not follow from the fact that some religions have 'interfered' that all have or that all "must" do so as part of their inherent nature.

4: This is also an **unsupported assertion** and an **sweeping generalization** (fallacy of accident), i.e. a confusion/conflation of 'some' with 'all,' i.e. a failure to note exceptions.

5: "Once again, *religion has poisoned everything*." (p. 27) Rhetorical exaggeration: this has no reasonable content, i.e. is **logical and scientific nonsense**, i.e. this is not a proposition that is amenable to scientific testing and has no scientific meaning at all –

which leads Hitchens into **inconsistency** since he thinks our thought should be scientific. It is **irrational**: how could religion poison mother's milk, the manufacture of ball-point pens, and the activity of bird-watching? What does "poisons" actually mean? If he means it as a metaphor it is either an example of poetic license, hyperbole, in which case there is no point trying to prove it – it can't be; or it is meant literally, then H has discovered scientific evidence of a new agent that can poison mother's milk, the manufacture of book-ends and prospecting for beryllium. He provides no such evidence. This claim is **pure rhetoric**, i.e. has no reason to support it but relies on emotional connotations

#6: Abuses done in God's name do not show God does not care, i.e. **non-sequitur**: God may have a different 'game-plan' e.g. c. f. Leibniz, this is the best of all (really) possible worlds.

#7: The abuse of religion does not demonstrate religion per se is man-made: **non-sequitur**. It demonstrates some people(s) are abusive.

Comment: Hitchens confuses and conflates all kinds of different issues and thus falls for logically unjustified conclusions.

8: To a significant extent, this book is also an example of a **fallacy of exclusion** or **part/whole fallacy** i.e. taking the part for the whole. It is certainly true that terrible things were done in the name of religion, but much good was also done, and good influence spread. H. wants us to see only the bad without also looking at the good.

9: Hitchens frequently indulges in logically meaningless tactics such as name calling (**ad lapidem**), gratuitous insults and smears: "To press this a little further, one may note that children if left unmolested by rabbis and imams . . . (39; 269)

10: **Inconsistency**: his intolerance to all religion supposedly in the name of greater tolerance. He wages a **self-undermining or self-refuting argument**. He is consistently no less strident than those he accuses of stridency.

11: "The third is that religion is – because it claims a special divine exemption for its practices and beliefs – not just amoral but immoral." (p. 52). **Non-sequitur**: the fact that religion claims divine exemption from

12: "The connection between religious faith and mental disorder is . . . both obvious and highly unmentionable." (p. 53): **Sweeping generalization**: the fact that some religious people are mentally ill, does not mean all are.

#12 a: **non-sequitur**: the fact that some religious people are mentally ill does not lead to the conclusion that there is any inherent connection between religion and mental illness. ('Every a is a B' does not mean every B is an 'a'.)

12 b: **mere assertion**: what is so "obvious" about the connection between religious belief and mental illness? Continuing, Hitchens talks about sex, thus

leading to **the red herring fallacy or misdirection and changing the subject.**
How do we get from mental illness = religion to sex?

13: “Clearly the human species is designed to experiment with sex. (54):

Inconsistency: how can the human species be designed to do anything when Hitchens rejects the argument from design and any sort of design in nature?

14: **Naturalistic fallacy**: from ‘is’ to ‘ought’: just because humans experiment with sex does not mean they *should* experiment with sex or that it is good for them to do so. We also drink and eat too much . . . that does not mean we should do it.

15: “Violent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism and tribalism and bigotry, invested in ignorance and hostile to free inquiry, contemptuous of women and coercive towards children . . .” **Sweeping generalization** (some/all confusion) and **appeal to emotion** (fear, pit, use of ‘trigger words’).

#16: “Religion comes from the period of human prehistory where nobody – had the smallest idea of what was going on.” (p. 64): **Genetic fallacy** (which Hitchens uses subsequently referring to our fear of eclipses etc.): we cannot prove that an idea is false simply by referring to its origins. (Evil people may be correct and good people wrong.)

17: **Affirmative conclusion from negative premise**: (also true of Dawkins)

For something to be true there must be evidence for it.
There is no evidence for the existence of God.
Therefore atheism must be true.

The conclusion is not required or necessary; other possibilities may be involved. This is a major error in formal logical and is often committed by atheists.

18: A general problem with H’s reasoning is the **fallacy of non-representative samples** which is also known as the **fallacy of exclusion** which is an on-going problem throughout the entire book. He cherry-picks the worst examples of religion vis-à-vis books or actions, and simply ignores everything else.

19: Because even children today know more about the “natural order” than the founders of religion, “all attempts to reconcile science and reason are consigned to failure and ridicule for precisely these (cf children) reasons” (p. 65): **non-sequitur** – just because we know science than before does not necessarily mean that reason and faith cannot be reconciled now or in the future or have been in the past; no connection between evidence and the conclusion. Also **fallacy of ambiguity**: “natural order” can mean many things.

20: Re the designer argument Hitchens mentions the story about Laplace: **red-herring or irrelevancy**: the story does nothing to prove (a) that God is not necessary to explain the existence of the cosmos or (b) that God does not exist.

#21: The pig prohibition (p. 41): “this apparently trivial fetish shows how religion, and faith and superstition distort our whole picture of the world.” (41): **unsupported assertion** that H does not explain at all. Rather, he quotes a novel, (“Lord of the Flies”) to support further claims about Iron Age man. i.e. fallacy of the **red-herring, i.e. irrelevance.**

22: “Thus the postulate of a designer or creator only raises the unanswerable question of who designed the designer or created the creator.” (p. 71) There are at least 3 fallacies here:

#22 a: **strawman fallacy (misrepresentation)** of opponent’s argument): the theistic argument is that anything that has a beginning in time requires a previous cause or creator. God has no beginning in time since S/he is a super-natural, non-physical entity. Therefore, God does not require a cause or creator. We can also say this is the fallacy of a **hypothesis contrary to fact.**

#22 b: **Category mistake:** Hitchens confuses a super-natural non-physical entity like God with the natural, physical entities of nature. Therefore, Hitchen’s argument does not apply to the arguments about a super-natural being (God), i.e. a **non sequitur**, i.e. missing the point.

#23: “But progress does not negate the idea of randomness” (p. 92): **the fallacy of ambiguity.** What this statement could mean 2 different things. (1) By “randomness” does he mean absolute unconstrained “randomness? If so, then randomness is incompatible with progress which can only be measured by approaching a certain goal or end-point and therefore must constrain randomness in order to favour some developments over others. Thus he is in **self-contradiction.** (2) Or does he mean “progress” in the sense of ‘change’ is not incompatible with randomness?

24: Hitchens rejects the theist “argument from design” because he believes the laws of nature can explain all natural phenomena (see Chp. 6, “Arguments from Design”). This leads to the fallacy of **begging the question** : by saying that the laws of nature (and the attributes of matter) can explain all natural phenomena, he assumes that these laws and attributes already exist to do their work. But it is precisely the existence of these laws and attributes we need to explain. He assumes that which we need to explain.

#24 a: if Hitchens replies that the laws of nature grew according to chance, this too is **begging the question:** chance is not random but obeys laws of probability. Where did these laws come from?

24 b: Those who reject the argument from design must answer 3 questions: (1) Where do the laws of physics come from? (2) Why do we have this particular set of laws and not some others (cf the principle of sufficient reason)? (3) Why and how do we have laws that cause chemicals to develop life, consciousness and intelligence? (if we say chance, see # 24 a)

25: “However, I was educated by Sir Karl Popper to believe that a theory that is not falsifiable is to that extent a weak one (p. 81). The **fallacy of self-refutation**: Popper’s own theory cannot be falsified. How could we set up a scientific experiment to prove that a theory that cannot be falsified is false? Therefore it fails its own test and is not scientific!

26: Hitchens bases his argument against “the metaphysical claims of religion” (p. 71) on Occam’s Razor, “Do not multiply entities beyond necessity” (p. 71): the **fallacy of oversimplification** (and consequent misrepresentation) or **reductionism**. Occam’s Razor does not mean (as Hitchens thinks) that the simplest explanation is always right, but rather that the simplest explanation that adequately and completely explains the whole phenomena including its complexities is more likely to be right. Occam’s razor cannot be used indiscriminately; its use must be rationally justified by the complexity of the phenomena to which it is applied. Otherwise its use distorts our understanding of that subject matter.

#26 a: the **fallacy of misapplication** : Occam’s razor works well in simple situations where there is not a lot of information and complexity to consider. The more complex a situation, the more careful we must be in using Occam’s razor, especially when we do not know all the facts which is certainly the case as far as the existence of the universe is concerned. If we do not know all the facts, how can we know which explanation is really the simplest or most economical? How can we know which entities have been multiplied “unnecessarily”?

#26 a 1: These questions come into play especially when we deal with the great limit questions, i.e. why is there something rather than nothing?; what is the origin of the universe? What is the origin of cosmic law and order? Why is that law and order the way it is? Why is reality organized in a certain way? Regarding these questions, the use of Occam’s razor raises more questions than it answers – which is why the new atheists’ use of it to provide so-called definitive answers is logically untenable, a non sequitur. Instead of blindly wielding the razor, we must be critically aware of our use and ask, ‘Why is it appropriate to use Occam’s razor in this situation?’ Hitchens fails here.

27: “Since human beings are naturally solipsistic all forms of superstition enjoy what might be called a natural advantage” (p. 74). **Unsupported claim i.e. bare assertion**: no evidence provided. This is an astounding claim given mankind’s entire existence in social groups and the extreme pain loneliness causes, i.e. isolation cells are considered torture. Consider our enormous susceptibility to social pressure from peers. Also **ambiguity**: the term “naturally” is subject to many interpretations.

28: Given the diversity of religion, Hitchens writes, “It could only also follow that only one of them is authentic” (p. 98): **Hasty generalization**: Hitchens does not consider other possibilities such as the Baha’i doctrine of progressive revelation which can reconcile these discrepancies.

29: The **fallacy of presentism (or anachronism)**: this fallacy, present throughout Hitchens' book, judges culturally, politically, socially, economically and militarily different pages ages by current standards of public morality. His remarks about the Old Testament, for example, illustrate this. Doing this leads to other logical fallacies: **misrepresentation and straw man; non sequiturs; hasty generalizations** and **false analogy** (You cannot judge apples by the standards of pears.)

30: "The self-taught Thomas Paine has never been refuted since he wrote . . ." (p. 104) **Begging the question**: Hitchens is trying to show Paine is right – by quoting Paine! Biblical literalist make the same mistake by 'proving' the Bible is right by quoting the Bible.

31: "In 2004, a soap-opera about the death of Jesus was produced by an Australian fascist and ham actor. . ." The **fallacy of ad hominem argument**: attacking Mel Gibson personally cannot prove or disprove anything about his work, ideas, beliefs. Hitchens uses the ad hominem fallacy throughout the book. Use of 'trigger words' like "fascist" is an example of the **fallacy of arguing by rhetoric rather than reason**. Hitchens' statements about child-molesting are also designed to arouse emotions to short-circuit reasoning.

32: The writers of the Gospels "cannot agree on anything of importance" (111). This is the fallacy of **hasty generalization** based on the **fallacy of exclusion** (excluding important evidence). In fact, there is agreement that (a) Jesus was crucified and buried; (b) his tomb was discovered empty; (c) He rose from the dead; (e) His disciples met Him after He rose from the dead. This is the core of the Christian message. He commits the **fallacy if misplaced emphasis** in the details that he uses.

33: "But I am compelled to remember what I know – which is there would be no such churches in the first place if humanity had not been afraid of the weather, the dark, the plague . . . and also if humanity had not been compelled on pain of extremely agonizing consequences to pay the exorbitant tithes and taxes that raised the imposing edifices." (65). This is a **part/whole fallacy**, i.e. mistaking the part for the whole. What Hitchens mentions is true – but it is not the whole truth about the origin of religion. Other elements also have a part – such as man's innate sense of wonder and mystery, intuitions of higher powers/beings, dreams, etc.

#33 a: **genetic fallacy**: the origin of a statement or practice cannot disprove its truth or value. A statement is true or false regardless of its origins. Religion may have primitive origins but that does not prove some of its insights are not true.

33 b: **reductionism**: Hitchens says humans were "compelled" by threats to pay taxes and build churches. There were many reasons for these activities, among them economic reasons as well as genuine devotion. He conflates devotion and compulsion, i.e. commits **the fallacy of conflation** (of differences).

34:) **Special pleading**: “Our [atheist] belief is not a belief. Our principles are not a faith. We do not rely solely upon science and reason because they are necessary rather than sufficient factors but we distrust anything that contradicts science or outrages reason.” (5).

What is the difference between a belief in God that cannot be supported by scientific verification and a belief in naturalist science or a falsifiability criterion that cannot be scientifically verified either? (E.g. there is no experiment to prove scientifically that only material/physical things are real.) Therefore, for what reason should we accept his plea? His own beliefs cannot meet the criteria he sets out for religion. This is also a **self-contradiction**.

35: “But many [of Jesus’ teachings] are unintelligible and show a belief in magic, several are absurd, and show a primitive attitude to agriculture and . . . many are on the face of it flat out immoral . . . the analogy of humans to lilies . . .” (118): the **fallacy of literalism**, i.e. reading parables and analogies intended metaphorically in a literal way. Also **missing the point** (ignoratio elenchi). Also **red herring/digression**: Hitchens ignores the point of these parables and analogies, and misunderstands Jesus’ need to talk to his followers in the language farmers could understand.

36: “All religions take care to silence or execute those who question them” (125). **Over generalization**, i.e. **fallacy of composition**, i.e. **part/whole fallacy**: This may be true of some religions at some time in their history but it is not true of all.

#36 a: **fallacy of ambiguity or equivocation**: the word “silence” can mean many things and interpreted in many ways; some might conceive as an invitation to debate or disagreement as ‘silencing.’ This statement can virtually fit any situation that arises. The words “take care to . . .” suggests a purposeful policy undertaken by the organization itself. Does Hitchens really mean this – or is he only insinuating it in order to evade consequences when challenged? Does he mean religions today do that as well? Where is the evidence? Why has Hitchens not been silenced? His attack on religion has been his best selling and most discussed book. His own fame and success refutes his claim: **self-refutation**.

#36 b: **unsupported generalization or mere assertion**: since this is true of all religions Hitchens should have no problem finding concrete examples of what he describes – yet he fails to do so.

37: **reductive fallacy**, i.e. over simplification: “If one comprehends the fallacies of any ‘revealed’ religion, one comprehends them all” (p. 126). Hitchens over simplifies religion as a phenomenon of tremendous historical and theological diversity. Thus, he distorts his subject matter by simplifying, i.e. committing the **fallacy of exclusion** of relevant data.

38: Hitchens rejects the idea that “the identical text can yield different commandments to different people” (p. 126): **non sequitur**: the fact that different peoples (often in

different circumstances) can read identical texts differently, does not disprove the truth of the text itself. There are many different understandings of quantum theory for example.

39: **non sequitur**: Hitchens claims that many of the *hadith* were copied from Jewish and Christian sources. But that does not prove they are false; it could plausibly be that Mohammed also revealed them or confirmed them in His teachings. This is an example of the **genetic fallacy**. (See also p. 134, where Hitchens shows another “patent . . . borrowing from the Ten Commandments.”)

40: “the last word on this subject [of miracles] was written by the Scottish philosopher David Hume” (p. 141). **Unsupported claim/ mere assertion**: how can Hitchens know that no future advance on Hume is possible?

40 a: Also **false dilemma**: there is no choice required between (a) the laws of nature suspended in our favour and (b) we are deluded or insane. There is at least one other option, i.e. secondary causes, i.e. that God works through natural laws. God does not need to suspend natural laws, but uses their operations to let improbable events happen.

41: Hitchens criticises Christians for saying ‘Christ died for my sins’ when Christ did not die at all. **Ignoratio elenchi, missing the point**: the point is a special relationship between Christ and a believer. Moreover, as a man, Christ died, which is why He had to be resurrected. We can’t be resurrected until we die. Also **fallacy of ignored intention**, i.e. condemning an argument for not satisfying a demand it was not intended to meet.

42: Re the *Something Beautiful for God* episode: this is typical of Hitchens’ arguing from anecdotal evidence which leads to **hasty generalizations** based on insufficient and/or exceptional evidence.

43: “What can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence” (150) **Self-refutation**: Hitchens presents no evidence/reasons why this dictum should be accepted. Thus it refutes itself. Nor is there reason to believe that any side of an argument is absolved of the responsibility of providing evidence – regardless of the ‘sins’ committed by the other side: **fallacy of two wrongs make a right (tu quoque)**

44: Hitchens claims that “textual criticism, archaeology, physics etc.” (p. 151) have provided better explanations than the ancient religious myths. This is **fallacy of reductionism**: not all religious myths are intended to explain physical/cosmic events. He is reducing the complexity of these myths to fit his theory about religions.

45: “If anything proves the human manufacture of religion it is the way that the Mormon elders resolved the difficulty [re Blacks]” (p. 167). **Over generalization, i.e. insufficient sample**. How can the case of one religion prove anything about all other religions in general? This may be an exception. Also an **unsupported assertion**.

46: “The first thing to be said is that virtuous behavior by a believer is no proof at all – indeed is not even an argument for – the truth of his belief” (185). **Self-contradiction:** yet Hitchens argues that the bad behavior of believers proves that there is no God and that religion is false. He cannot have it both ways.

47: Hitchens quotes A.J. Ayer’s reply “I must say that I think this is a perfectly monstrous insinuation” (p. 186) to Butler’s statement wondering why atheists don’t lead “a life of unbridled immorality” (p. 185). **Non sequitur** or **fallacy of missing the point:** the fact that Butler’s suggestion is “monstrous” does not disprove what he has suggested. Ayer’s ‘answer’ does not answer Butler’s point. Also **appeal to emotion:** Hitchens wants us to agree with Ayer because he wants us to share Ayer’s indignation.

48: “... religions could never have got started, let alone thrived, unless for the influence of men as fanatical as Moses or Mohammed or Joseph Kony, while charity and relief work . . . are the inheritors of modernism and the Enlightenment” (p. 192). **Wishful thinking fallacy** re “charity and relief work” which were widely practiced during the Christian (by 3rd Century A.D.) and Muslim middle ages. They began long before the Enlightenment i.e. eighteenth century and modernism. Also **fallacy of hypothesis** **contrary to fact** and **fallacy of suppressed evidence**.

49: “There are, indeed, several ways in which religion is not just amoral but positively immoral” (205). **Fallacy of lack of proportion**, i.e. the evidence does not support the extreme author’s conclusion. Also **fallacy of suppressed evidence**.

50: “And religion is scapegoating writ large” (211). **Fallacy of hasty generalization**, i.e. a conclusion drawn from too small a sample, in this case the Jewish and Christian religions. What about Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Baha’i?

51: “Ordinary conscience will do without any heavenly wish behind it” (214). **Begging the question** and **mere assertion fallacy:** Whether or not ordinary conscience is sufficient to make us moral is precisely the issue up for debate and must be proven rather than assumed. Hitchens’ attack on the connection between religion and morality is based on his assumption that we do not need religion to be moral.

52: “Nothing proves the man-made character of religion as obviously as the sick mind that designed hell . . .” (p. 219). **Non sequitur:** in what way does the torturous picture of hell prove that religion is “man-made”? The unpleasant nature of hell does not allow us to draw any conclusions about the origins of this idea – man or God.

53: “If religious instruction were not allowed until the child had attained the age of reason, we would be living in quite a different world” (220). **Fallacy of appeal to the unknowable** (as if it were true): how can Hitchens or anyone else know what the world would be like under such circumstances? Also **wishful thinking**.

54: Hitchens approvingly quotes Orwell’s statement that “A totalitarian state is in effect a theocracy and its ruling caste in order to keep its position has to be thought of as

infallible” (232). **Fallacy of emphasis**, i.e. Orwell (and Hitchens) make infallibility claims the decisive/essential attribute of a theocracy rather than a state based on divine revelation and guided by those divinely inspired. Infallibility is one attribute of theocracy but the claim of infallibility alone does not establish a state as a theocracy. Infallibility is necessary for a theocracy but is not sufficient to establish a theocracy.

#54 a: **False analogy**: Hitchens is trying to draw an analogy between religion and totalitarianism, i.e. that religion per se is necessarily and inherently totalitarian. He simply ignores the differences that negate his claims. Also **argument by spurious similarity**.

55: “Benito Mussolini had barely seized power in Italy before the Vatican made an official treaty with him known as the Lateran Pact of 1929” (235). **Error of fact**: Mussolini seized power in 1922 and did not sign the Lateran Pact until 1929, i.e. 7 years later. Also **argument by rhetoric** (not reason): to accuse the Vatican he rhetorically glosses over the facts.

56: “Communist absolutists did not so much negate religion . . . as seek to replace it” (246). **False analogy**: Hitchens is trying to present Communism, in which atheism was an essential and foundational doctrine, as a type of religion. He wants to forestall the counter-argument that atheism as practiced in the Communist world severely undermines any attempt to assert the moral superiority of atheism and atheists. However, there are too many essential differences between dialectical and historical materialism (Communism) and religion to allow any meaningful analogy. This is also an example of the **fallacy of guilt by association**, i.e. claiming an inherent relationship between religion and totalitarianism. _

57: “The connection between religion, racism and totalitarianism is also found in the other most hateful dictatorship of the twentieth century: the vile system of apartheid in South Africa” (251). **Non sequitur**: just because some parties in the SA government its racist regime on religion does not mean that all religion is inherently racist or totalitarian. Also **over generalization** from a limited sample. Also an attempt at **guilt by association**.

58: “the object of perfecting the species – which is the very root and source of the totalitarian impulse – is in essence a religious one . . .” (232). **Self-contradiction**: Hitchens’ purpose in writing this book is to improve human beings by freeing them from religion. So is Hitchens really a totalitarian at heart?

58 a: Not only is this an **unsupported assertion**, i.e. Hitchens provides no evidence for his theory of the origins of the totalitarian impulse.

58 b: It is also a case of **guilt by association**: rather than explain why the goal of improving human behavior and intellect (obviously shared by Hitchens, all parents and education, health systems) are the root of

totalitarianism Should we give up trying to improve human beings? Reduce education and

medical care? Give up the rehabilitation of criminals. Hitchens associates it with a negative like totalitarianism and tries to make that the end of the argument.

59: “Atheists have in all times and all places been subject to ruthless suppression” (254).

Self-contradiction: Hitchens himself has not been subject to ruthless suppression – else he would not have been able to write his book and get it published to become a best-seller. Also **fallacy of overgeneralization** as in “in all times and all places.” As so much else in Hitchens, this is rhetoric not reason.

60: “In no real as opposed to nominal sense, then, was he [Martin Luther King Jr] a Christian.” (p. 176). **Unsupported assertion:** no evidence supports this surprising allegation. Also, the **‘no true scotsman’ fallacy:** despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, King was *not really* a Christian.

61: “What is more likely – that a man should be used as a transmitter by god to deliver some already existing revelation or that he should be utter some already existing revelations and believe himself to be or claim to be, ordered by god to do so?” (p. 135). Both Hitchens and Hume (whom he quotes) indulge the fallacy of **false dilemma:** there are other possibilities – unless we choose to accept their naturalistic ontology in which no non-material/non-physical entities exist. Both possibilities might be true, e.g. a prophet sent to re-emphasize teachings that have been ignored.

62: “Augustine maintained . . . that the earth was less than six thousand years old”(260). **Error of fact:** “What kind of days these were it is extremely difficult, or perhaps impossible for us to conceive, and how much more to say!”(City of God 11:6 [AD 419]).

Again, Hitchens shows he is not a reliable source for important historical facts.

63: “I have no right to claim past philosophers as putative ancestors of atheism, I do, however have the right to point out that because of religious intolerance we cannot know what they really thought privately . . .” (264). **Unsupported speculation:** no one can know what they – or anyone else – thought privately, so reference to this is an example of the **red herring fallacy**, i.e. irrelevant consideration.

63 a: His reference to Descartes’ tombstone inscription is also a **red herring** fallacy by playing on what may be a coincidence and which proves nothing one way or the other.

64: Speaking of Kant, Hitchens writes, “he was able to make convincing arguments against any theistic presentation [of God’s existence] that depended upon reason” (265). **Fallacy of suppressed evidence:** not only does he ignore the debate still continuing on this issue but ignores the fact that Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* re-introduces God as the logically necessary foundation of all morality and as a “regulative” necessity for

man's moral life. Kant rejects theoretical proofs of God but not the practical necessity for God.

65: "Human decency is not derived from religion. It precedes it" (p. 266). **Self-contradiction**: How could this be proven or falsified as according to Popper whose falsification principle Hitchens accepts as a given? See # 26.

66: Hitchens cites Kant's categorical imperative as a sufficient basis for ethics: "Kant's principle enjoins us to 'act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a general natural law.' In this summary of mutual interest and solidarity there is no requirement for any enforcing or supernatural authority" (p. 266).

66 a: **Begging the question / circular reasoning**: Kant's maxim assumes a willingness to be moral at the very outset – and thus assumes what is to be proven. Without that foundational willingness, no morality is possible – but what if I don't want to be reasonable or it is in my interest to be inconsistent and socially irresponsible? Thus, Kant does not provide a foundation for morality but rather a rule by which to judge decisions made by those who have already embraced morality. Why should they agree to this? It provides no reason for the amoral to be moral.

66 b: **Non sequitur**: Hitchens' claim that Kant's categorical imperative shows no enforcing authority is necessary does not necessarily follow from Kant's principle. Given the 'agreement problem' cited in # 66 a it shows the exact opposite of what Hitchens claims, i.e. that an enforcing authority is necessary.

67: Hitchens approvingly quotes Epicurus: "Is he[God] willing to prevent evil but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" (p. 268). **False dilemma**: there are other possibilities, e.g. depending on how we define 'evil.' If 'evil' refers to human acts, then God does not interfere because to do so would negate human free will which is a defining trait of human beings. **Unwarranted assumption**: Epicurus (and Hitchens) also assume that whatever displeases humans or goes against their interest is necessarily 'evil' – and that assumption is not warranted.

68: "Faith-based fanatics could not design anything as useful or beautiful as a skyscraper or a passenger aircraft" (280). **Unsupported assertion**: on what grounds does Hitchens make this general statement?

69: Hitchens believes "that conscience is innate: (256), this being one of the lessons we can learn from Socrates. **Self-undermining proposition**: If conscience is innate, then how did the evil of religion arise? How could it have? How could it have been so overwhelmingly successful for so long over an innate power?

69 a: **Self-undermining proposition**: If conscience precedes religion as Hitchens claims, then religion obviously grew out of the innate conscience. That

means religion is not intrinsically evil, even if we think it went awry at certain times and requires renewal. How can religion by its very nature “poison everything”?

70: **Straw man**: This logical error is committed throughout Hitchens’ book when he deals with various scriptures; he tries to reduce all religion to scriptural literalism to “dogmatic extremists . . . perverts, perpetrators of human suffering and fanatics” (Haught 38). Thus, his arguments are aimed at a version of religion that only the strictest fundamentalists believe and that is rejected by the majority of believers. As early as the 2nd C AD Origen (a Church Father) criticised literalist interpretations of the creation story; in the 5th C A.D., Augustine in his “*The Literal Interpretation of Genesis*” states that the creation story conveys a spiritual meaning not a literal scientific account. Hitchens’ view is also a **reducto ad absurdum**, i.e. an attempt to discredit an idea by reducing it to a laughable extreme.

NOTE: This list is not exhaustive but it makes clear that Hitchens’ book is not a good source of arguments in favour of atheism.

71: Throughout his book, Hitchens is outraged and offended by various misdeed and/or practices of religion. This is a **red-herring fallacy**: whether or not he is outraged is totally irrelevant to the validity of his arguments. Outrage does not make one right.

II The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins

72: **Straw man**: Like Hitchens, Dawkins commits this fallacy throughout his book by insisting on the literalist reading of all scripture in order to denigrate religion. As noted in # 70, this leaves us with a parody of religion that bases itself on a biased or **incomplete sample**, i.e. a **fallacy of reductionism** that reduces religion to one part of itself.

73: Dawkins believes that the methods of natural science (measurable/quantifiable, physical, repeatable and public are the only way to gain genuine knowledge of and understand reality. Only what meets these criteria counts as true knowledge. The limits of nature are the limits of reality. The only alternative to this is superstition and irrationality. **Self-refutation**: how can we do a scientific experiment to show that Dawkins’ view of science is true? There is no way to falsify this (Popper). Thus, Dawkins’ claim does not meet its own standard for being true and scientific.

#73 a: **False alternatives or false dilemma**: other possibilities are possible – e.g. moderate rationalism according to which some things (material realities) can be known by the scientific method but other things can be known by reason alone, or by immediate intuition (the way we know our own bodies).

74: Dawkins defines an atheist as a “philosophical naturalist . . . who believes there is nothing beyond the natural, physical world, no supernatural creative intelligence lurking behind the observable universe, no soul that outlasts the body and no miracles . . .”(p. 35).

Self-refutation: no scientific experiment can prove or disprove this claim. Dawkins undermines his own demands for scientific knowledge and relies on an unproven and unprovable assumption. How do we know there is only one true explanatory mode for all possible phenomena?

74 a: By using Occam's Razor uncritically, Dawkins falls into the fallacy of **false dilemma** between science and irrationality. Occam's Razor states that "entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily." This It does not mean the simplest explanation is always right, but rather that the simplest explanation that adequately explains the phenomena is more likely to be right. However, while Occam's Razor is useful for simple things, it becomes more problematical when applied to complex things about which we are minimally informed, e.g. the universe and its origins. How can we know what the simplest explanation actually is with something we don't fully understand? Simply, i.e. uncritically invoking Occam's Razor is an example of the **fallacy of oversimplification**, or **misrepresentation**.

75: "This book will advocate an alternative view: *any creative intelligence of sufficient complexity to design anything comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution*" (p. 53). The most obvious fallacy is the **unwarranted assumption** that God, like any other object in nature, must be complex in the manner of physical things in order to create complexity. This is a fallacy of **false analogy**. Indeed, by Dawkins' own definition (p. 39) God is precisely not like natural objects. Thus, Dawkins falls into the **straw man fallacy**, arguing against a belief that almost all religions reject. By doing so, he falls into **self-contradiction** with his own definition of God (p. 39).

76: "The existence of God is a scientific hypothesis like any other" (p. 72). A scientific hypothesis can be proved or disproved by a scientific experiment meeting the criteria of quantifiability, objectivity, physicality (matter or energy), predictability, repeatability existing in space and time. **Self-refutation:** how can the existence or non-existence of a super-natural, non-physical being that does not exist in space and time be proven by an experiment requiring physicality and quantifiability etc? Thus, God's existence cannot be a "scientific hypothesis." This undermines many of Dawkins' subsequent arguments.

76 a: **Amphiboly:** If Dawkins uses 'hypothesis' scientifically, he is talking self-refuting nonsense; if he is using it loosely, then he is misleading his readers.

77: The "celestial teapot" analogy (p.74) of God. **False analogy:** the celestial tea-pot is not like God insofar as it is an impossible, i.e. non-material version of a material object. However, God, by definition is not a single, particular material/physical object, moving in space between earth and Mars. Also **category mistake:** Dawkins confuses and conflates two different kinds of things: a particular physical object in space and time, and a being that is neither in space nor time and is not a particular physical object.

77 a: **Begging the question**: Dawkins (and Russell's) argument only works if we assume that only natural entities exist, that all objects are like tea-pots, celestial or otherwise. But this is exactly what has to be proved in the debate between theists and atheists.

78: "What on earth is a why question? Not every English sentence beginning with the word 'why' is a legitimate question" (p. 80). **Red herring fallacy**: he discusses the "smell of hope" (p. 80) in order to dismiss questions about the 'why questions' concerning the origins, structure and nature of the universe – which are legitimate questions growing out of the principle of sufficient reason (Leibniz) which is the basis of all science, i.e. knowing the reasons for events, processes etc. Also **missing the point fallacy**.

79: Re three proofs of God (the unmoved mover, the uncaused cause, the cosmological argument) Dawkins writes, "All three of these arguments rely upon the idea of a regress and invoke God to terminate it. They make the entirely unwarranted assumption that God himself is immune to the regress" (p. 101). The assumption that God is immune from infinite regress is based on the fact that the infinite regress argument applies only to things that are physical/material, exist in time and space and thus are dependent on other things for their existence or motion. But God is ontologically different from ordinary objects; as Dawkins says, He is "supernatural." For this reason He is "immune to the regress." Thus the assumption that God is immune from infinite regress is not "unwarranted," i.e. Dawkins commits the **fallacy of false attribution**. Furthermore, Dawkins conflates and confuses two kinds of things, i.e. ordinary physical things and non-physical entities, i.e. commits **the fallacy of category mistake**. Also **self-contradiction**: Dawkins says God is supernatural on one hand but treats Him like an ordinary object on the other. He cannot have it both ways.

79 a: A non-physical entity is needed to terminate the infinite regress of ordinary causal events since otherwise, reaching any point in an infinite number of causal events would take an infinite amount of time – and we would never arrive at the present. But we have reached the present. Therefore, the line of causal events is not infinite and must end with something that is itself not a subject to the same ontological limitations as ordinary objects and causal events, i.e. does not exist in time and space, is not physical/material, and does not depend on anything else to exist or to act.

An infinite regress of causes does not work because each action depends on a prior action as its necessary and sufficient condition. In an infinite regress of physical actions each event will always be waiting for the sufficient and necessary condition to arrive – but it never does because the sequence needed to provide its necessary and sufficient conditions can never be completed.

Only a supernatural entity can be the terminator or start of this infinite regress of causes because it alone is not subject to a necessary and sufficient cause. Only a supernatural being can be a "natural terminator" of such a regress.

80: Dawkins says that aside from God as a terminator of the infinite regress, there is no need to give God such attributes as omnipotence, goodness, creativity etc. (p. 101). **Red herring fallacy**: these attributes of God have nothing to do with the question of God's existence.

81: "If God is omniscient, he must already know how he is going to intervene to change the course of history. . ." (p. 101). **Category mistake**: Dawkins imagines that God exists in time like ordinary natural objects – but if he is "supernatural" as Dawkins claims, He obviously need not do so. Present, future and past may all be one to God; or He may exist timelessly.

82: Dawkins tries to refute the argument from degree (for God's existence): "That's an argument? You might as well say people vary in smelliness but we can make the comparison only by reference to a perfect degree of conceivable smelliness" (p. 102).

Straw man fallacy: In its true form this argument distinguishes between 'transcendentals' and ordinary attributes (concrete descriptors) like color, smell etc. Transcendental attributes belong to all real things, e.g. unity, goodness (in themselves) truth and being. Dawkins' reply distorts the argument in order to mock it – but he does not really answer the argument as originally given. **Missing the point fallacy**: he does not answer the argument but merely mocks it.

83: "Incidentally, it has not escaped the notice of logicians that omniscience and omnipotence are mutually incompatible" (p.101). **Category mistake**: this might be true if God were a natural entity like all the others, but since God is "supernatural" (by Dawkins' own definition), He is not subject to time and thus the whole concept of God knowing His future mind" is moot. God has no future or past.

84: Dawkins refers to other supposed arguments for God's existence: the argument from beauty; the argument from 'personal experience'; the argument from scripture; the argument from admired religious scientists; Pascal's Wager; bayesian arguments for God (elsewhere he list other arguments, e.g. argument from sheer will, from non-belief, from post-death experiences, from emotional blackmail.). **Straw man fallacy**: weak non-arguments for Dawkins to make his case against theists look strong and the theists' case look weak. It is a rhetorical ploy rather than a reasoned argument. None of these are part of philosophical debates about God's existence, i.e. **unrepresentative sample fallacy**.

84 a: re Pascal's Wager: **Ignored intention fallacy**: Pascal's Wager is not about proving the existence of God but about why we should believe in God rather than not. It is not intended to prove God exists but to give reasons for belief.

85: "Why there almost certainly is no God" (title of the chapter, p. 137): **weasel words fallacy** and **inconsistency**: the words "almost certainly" allow Dawkins to wiggle out of unpleasant unforeseen consequences of his beliefs. These words are also inconsistent with the absolutist claims and rhetoric throughout his book.

86: “Any entity capable of intelligently designing something as improbable as a Dutchman’s Pipe (or a universe) would have to be even more improbable than a Dutchman’s Pipe” (146). **Category mistake**: Dawkins confuses natural objects – of which this might be true – with a supernatural being, of which this is not necessarily true. He confuses and conflates two different kinds of things, natural and supernatural. He also shows this confusion when he says, “Once again, this is because the designer himself (herself/itself) immediately raises the problem of his own origin” (146). See also “who designed the designer?” (p. 147). This question shows a **straw man fallacy**: Dawkins substitutes his own definition of God as subject to the normal rules of all natural objects i.e. having a cause, for the philosophical definition of God as a supernatural being exempt from these rules.

86 a: It may be argued that Dawkins does not have to abide by the natural/supernatural distinction since he does not believe in the supernatural. This is problematical for two reasons. (1) Dawkins himself introduced this distinction in his definition of theism and atheism. Having framed the argument in these terms, he is bound to abide by it for logical consistency. (2) If Dawkins wants to refute the traditional philosophical arguments for and about God, then he is obligated to refute God as defined by these arguments. Otherwise he is talking about something else, i.e. is off-topic, missing the point or setting up a straw man.

87: “The answer is that natural selection is a cumulative process which breaks the problem of improbability into small pieces . . . [his Mount Improbable analogy]” (147). **Dubious analogy, i.e. speculative analogy**: Dawkins argues by analogy here, the vertical cliff on one side of Mt. Improbable and the “gentle slope” (p. 147) on the other. IOW, probability rose– but this is an assumption that he has no way of proving. It is pure, i.e. unsupported and unsupportable speculation (we cannot go back to the past). (This does not make creationism right.) Also it leaves unanswered the question of why subsequent mutations should support life rather than tear it down, especially in a universe where all chances are possible? Why would life become more probable at any stage of development? Is there a ‘natural tendency’ to support life – if so, then how (and from where) did this bias (teleology) arise? Dawkins’ analogy is not necessarily false but it is dubious because it raises serious problems he does not answer.

87 a: **Dubious analogy** insofar as he assumes that (a) a “gentle slope” even exists as an alternative to the sheer cliff, and (b) insofar as he assumes the difference between non-life and life is a “gentle slope.” Insofar as Dawkins’ argument against divine creation depends on this analogy, it is a weak argument.

88: Against the anthropic principle, Dawkins writes, “A God capable of calculating the Goldilocks values for the six numbers would have to be at least as improbable as the finely tuned combination of numbers itself” (p. 171-172; see also 176, 177, 178, 184). **Category mistake**: as noted before, Dawkins confuses the natural and supernatural order.

88 a: His argument only works if he assumes what needs to be proved in the theist/atheist debate – that the supernatural order does not exist, i.e. the **fallacy of begging the question**.

89: “When we finally reach the long-hoped-for Theory of Everything . . .” (p. 173). **Fallacy of emotional appeal**: Dawkins appeals to our emotion of hope and confidence in science because he has – and can have – no evidence about what the future may or may bring.

90: “Science explains complex things in terms of the interactions of simpler things . . .” (p. 176). **Category mistake**: Dawkins goes beyond the methodology of scientific naturalism, i.e. the naturalistic explanation of specific processes, events, by leaping to ontological conclusions about the nature of reality as a whole and the existence/non-existence of God. His ontological naturalism is a philosophical extension of methodological naturalism into metaphysics. Methodological naturalism explains specific natural phenomena by strictly natural means; it does not concern itself with ontology. This confusion and conflating of the methodological and the ontological categories is one of the fallacies that underlies all of *The God Delusion*.

91: “The first cause that we seek must have been the simple basis for a self-bootstrapping crane which eventually raised the world . . . into its present complex existence” (p. 185). **Begging the question**: he assumes that matter has (and had) certain attributes which allow self-bootstrapping but it is precisely the existence of these attributes which must be explained.

92: **False dilemma**: Dawkins assumes that the concept of God is incompatible with the concept of evolution; we can believe in one or the other. But this is not necessarily the case. One alternative is to say that God created matter/energy with certain inherent potentials and that by means of evolution, these potentials were actualized.

93: Evolution needs “some luck to get started” (p. 169). **Begging the question**: what he suggests may be true, but misses the key issue and assumes what is to be proven: what is the origin of “luck,” chance or probability laws? What is the origin of the particular attributes of matter that allow luck to work? The existence of these must be explained before we can go ahead and assume that they worked in evolution. Moreover, these questions are not pointless; they follow from the principle of sufficient reason which is the basic principle of all scientific inquiry.

94: In the chapter entitled “The Roots of Religion,” Dawkins mentions various theories about the origin of religion including his own. **Genetic Fallacy**: none of these explanations about the origin of religion prove or disprove the fundamental assertion of religion, viz. the existence of a supernatural source or ground for reality, i.e. ‘God.’ An idea cannot be disproven by its provenance. This is also a case of **missing the point** and **non sequitur**.

95: “Religion can be seen as the misfiring of several of these modules” (p. 208; see also 218). **Genetic fallacy**: even if this were true, it does not disprove the fundamental claim of religion about the existence of a supernatural source or ground for reality. **Missing the Point and non sequitur**.

#95 a: **Unsupported assertion**: Dawkins has no scientific evidence whatever that such a “misfiring” ever occurred.

96: **False analogy and self-contradiction**: on a massive scale in his espousal of meme theory (223). Memes are a false analogy to genes because they (a) do not exist in space, (b) are not physical/material, (c) have no internal structure i.e. no physically separate or component parts or clear boundaries, (d) are not involved in any measurable energetic processes within themselves, amongst themselves or with other beings, (e) do not show, action, agency, e.g. competition, accommodation, (f) have no inherent interests or even self-interests (all their interests are attributed to them externally), (g) have no intention and cannot act intentionally, (h) have no inherent reproductive capacity, (i) cannot be quantified, (j) “have no chromosomes or loci or alleles or sexual recombination,”¹ (k) are not testable by the scientific method Memes also lack definitional precision. How, for example, do we distinguish between the meme phenotype and the genotype? The examples provided by Dawkins and Dennett could refer to either. This lack of precision matters because evolutionary theory requires this distinction; without it meme-theory is simply not a scientific evolutionary theory.

96 a: Thus memes are not objects of scientific study – which leads Dawkins into **self-contradiction** with his demand for scientific rigour especially from theists, and they are not testable by the scientific method. The analogy between biological and cultural processes is also untestable by the scientific method. How can they themselves be studied in a laboratory experiment? Memes are not empirical; they are mental constructs – just as ‘God’ is according to Dawkins.

96 b: Because memes are significantly different from genes or viruses in so many essential ways, the analogy is false, and his theory about the transmission of religious ideas based on this analogy is inherently flawed or false. The differences between them are too great and too numerous to allow valid inferences from one to the other.

96 c: **Another self-contradiction** involves Occam’s Razor which Dawkins likes to invoke against theists: “do not multiply entities unnecessarily.” Here Dawkins has invented a new entity, memes, because it allows them to present human intellectual life in biological, i.e. Darwinian evolutionary terms. He likes to use Occam’s Razor to exclude God, but ignore this standard to include memes.

96 d: Dawkins commits **the pathetic fallacy**, i.e. treating inanimate things (ideas, images) as if they were alive, i.e. as if they have interests and agendas, gain or loss. The pathetic fallacy is a specific kind of category mistake, to which

¹ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p.223.

Dawkins is very prone. The living characteristics of memes are imposed on them externally by people and no real (as distinct from mental) connection to anything inherent in a meme.

96 e: 2.3) “[In memes] there is nothing obviously corresponding to chromosomes or loci or alleles or sexual recombination. The meme pool is less structured and less organized than the gene pool. Nevertheless, it is not obviously silly to speak of a meme pool in which particular memes might have a ‘frequency’ which can change as a consequence of competitive interactions with alternative memes” (223). **Fallacy of special pleading**: even though memes are not proper scientific objects Dawkins wants us to accept memes and meme pools. Why? For what reasons other than that memes happen to suit his understanding of the world?

97: “Perhaps Islam is analogous to a carnivorous genes complex and Buddhism to a herbivorous one” (232): **False analogy**: for obvious reasons the Islamic or Buddhist religion differ so dramatically from genes of any sort, that a meaningful and/or scientific comparison is impossible. For Dawkins to offer this statement in a book complaining about the absurdities of religion is a blatant **self-contradiction** of his avowed purpose of remaining rational and scientific.

98: “. . . memetic natural selection of some kind seems to be to offer a plausible account of the detailed evolution of particular religions” (p. 233). Given the documentable unscientific nature of meme theory, this claim is an example of the **fallacy exceeding the evidence**. Indeed, Dawkins has no scientific evidence at all for memes let alone “memetic natural selection.” The same can be said of “memeplexes – cartels of mutually compatible memes” (p. 233).

#99: Re cargo cults: “But they do provide fascinating contemporary evidence for the way religions spring up from almost nothing” (p. 239). **Fallacy of over generalization**: one example is not enough to support a generalization about the origin of religion. How do we know this is not a non-representative sample?

100: “We now have found four good Darwinian reasons for individuals to be altruistic, generous or ‘moral’ towards each other” (p. 251). **Fallacy of conflated terms**: ‘altruism’ and ‘morality’ are not the same things insofar as ‘morality’ covers much more than ‘altruism.’ For example, morality covers many injunctions not linked to altruism: e.g. truth-telling; a sense of human rights; fair play; consistency in the way we treat people; honesty with money, tests, spouses, work etc. By conflating these two terms, Dawkins commits the **fallacy of exceeding the evidence**: even if the genetic origin of altruism is true, we exceed our evidence if we extrapolate this to ‘morality’ as a whole.

101: Dawkins rejects the argument from design (p. 103), i.e. the view that nature’s complexity could not have arisen by chance but requires a designer of some sort. His reply that evolution makes the question moot is a case of **begging the question**: saying that evolution can explain all complexity assumes that matter already possessed the

attributes that allow evolution to take place and that the physical laws needed for evolution are already operating. But the existence of these attributes and laws is exactly what needs to be explained in the first place – and the explanation of evolution does not without committing this fallacy. Virtually all refutations of the design argument make this error (.e.g. Hitchens). Also **missing the point**: Dawkins’ answer misses the really difficult question raised by the design argument, i.e. what is the origin of the attributes and laws that make the natural growth of complexity possible?

102: “Some philosophers, notably Kant, have tried to derive absolute morals from non-religious sources . . .” **Suppressed evidence, fallacy of omission**: Kant eliminated proofs for God’s existence (*The Critique of Pure Reason*) but then re-instated God as a necessary regulative principle for morality in *The Critique of Practical Reason*. He re-instated God precisely because he says that God is needed as an absolute foundation for morals. Unless morals have an absolute foundation, morals becomes mere opinions and thereby a source of conflict among clashing opinions which have no final standard by which to arbitrate.

Dawkins ignores this just as he ignores the statement by Hume, one of his favourite ‘scientific’ philosophers: “*The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion.*” (Introduction to *The Natural History of Religion*”, emphasis added.) (<http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/humenathisti.html>)

103: “Fortunately, however, morals do not have to be absolute” (p. 265). **Category mistake**: If morals do not have to be absolute, then we are subjectively free to apply or not apply them as we see fit. But this reduces moral rules to subjective preferences since they lack powers of compulsion. Dawkins confuses personal preferences with laws/moral injunctions which are supposed to regulate personal preferences. It is evident that aside from the logical error, Dawkins’ position leads to all kinds of problems in society, e.g. whose moral system will prevail in a case of difference/conflict?

104: RE Abraham and Isaac: “if not as literal fact, how should we take the story? As an allegory? Then an allegory for what? Surely nothing praiseworthy. As a moral lesson? But what kind of moral could one derive from this appalling story?” (275). False dilemma: according to him, we must choose between (a) a terrible allegory and (b) a literal reading that must be rejected. But other choices are available, even if we take the story as an allegory. For example, the lesson may be ‘let nothing detract you from following that which is most important to you.’ (A psychological or existential understanding.) A religious understanding may be that God is our primary obligation. Or, ‘There are higher obligations in this life than your own feelings and preferences.’ These are all very salutary lessons – that virtually all human beings have learned in one way or another.

105: Dawkins is contemptuous of those who “pick and choose among the scriptures for the nice bits and reject the nasty” (275). The **fallacy of inconsistency or self-contradiction**: Dawkins does the same, selecting the nasty parts and rejecting the good parts for example, when he claims that “modern morality wherever else it comes from does not come from the Bible.”(279)..

#105 a: Dawkins’ insistence (and that of other new atheists) on reading scriptures literally is also an example of the **fallacy of selective reading (unrepresentative sample)** they simply ignore other readings (symbolic, existential etc.) and the long history of such readings because these undermine their case against religion. This is also an example of **the fallacy of suppressed evidence**.

105 b: These two fallacies undermine Dawkins’ belief that the Bible cannot be the source of our morality (p. 278). **Non sequitur**: such a conclusion is not a rational consequence irrational if it is not based on all the evidence and adequately deals with various ways of understanding or interpreting the evidence.

106: “They [theologians] cannot get away with it, even if they employ that favourite trick of interpreting selected scriptures as ‘symbolic’ rather than literal. By what criterion do you decide which passages are symbolic, which literal?” (p. 280). Here Dawkins is trying to defend his selective reading and selective use of evidence to make his case. He commits the **fallacy of unsupported assertion** i.e. simply asserts that theologians cannot use non-literal readings but he does not explain why such symbolic understandings are illegitimate. Obviously, they undermine his case.

106 a: **Inconsistency / Self-contradiction and the fallacy of presentism**: Dawkins advocates evolution on one hand and denies evolution when it comes to differing necessities in differing social circumstances in history e.g. the ancient Hebrews. He judges them by the standards of the present time without explaining why it is rational to commit such anachronisms.

106 b: In this context, Dawkins’ question about deciding when to read literally or symbolically shows the **fallacy of assumption**. He assumes there is no answer to his rhetorical question when in fact a vast hermeneutical literature is available on this very subject – a literature with which he shows not the slightest familiarity.

The fact that such a literature exists undermines his case for simplistic, literalist readings.

107: “I do not believe there is an atheist in the world who would bulldoze Mecca – or Chartres . . .” (p. 283). **Non sequitur**: the truth of this assertion does not follow from his belief. His belief itself proves nothing one way or the other especially since he makes an **unsupported assertion**. Moreover, this statement is a patent **appeal to authority** – his own!

107 a: **Fallacy of suppressed evidence**: Atheism is a foundational principle of Communism (Marxist-Leninism) and an integral part of its philosophical world-view. Communism's history of destroying religious buildings as well as religious art and books is well documented from the time of Lenin and Stalin in Russia to the time of the Red Guards in China. It is difficult to believe that someone writing about atheism and making such claims does not know about the destruction and mass murder wrought by Communists in the pursuit of their atheistic philosophy.

108: “Progressive ethicists today find it hard to defend any kind of retributive theory of punishment, let alone the scapegoat theory – executing an innocent to pay for the sins of the guilty” (p. 287). The first fallacy here is the **appeal to popularity**. He bases the validity of his argument on what most “progressive ethicists” supposedly say. That cannot prove his opposition to retributive justice.

#108 a: **Over simplification, suppressed evidence fallacy, misrepresentation**: Dawkins over simplifies and thereby distorts and misrepresents what Christianity teaches by suppressing the fact that Christ voluntarily gave Himself as a sacrifice for human sin. This fundamentally changes the nature of the event; there is a difference between someone who voluntarily and freely dies to save others and someone selected for death as a scapegoat.

109: “. . . and this is important and widely overlooked – without religion there would be no labels by which to decide whom to oppress and whom to avenge” (p. 294). The fallacy of **over generalization / sweeping generalization**. Are there no other beliefs such as nationalism, racism, class and/or money-snobbery, political and ideological allegiances, which can cause human division?

109 a: **Self-contradiction**: “I do not deny that humanity's powerful tendencies towards in-group loyalties and out-group hostilities would exist even in the absence of religion” (p. 295). Here Dawkins diametrically contradicts what he said in # 109.

110: Hitler and Stalin as atheists: The fallacies of **over simplification** and **suppressed evidence**. Hitler's “religious beliefs have been a matter of dispute, in part because of apparently inconsistent statements made by and attributed to him. The relationship between [Nazism and religion](#) was complex and shifting over the period of the [Nazi Party's](#) existence and during its years in power.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler%27s_religious_beliefs) Dawkins suppresses information about the complexity of this subject in order to sustain his simplistic picture of the situation.

For his part Stalin was an atheist and vigorously (and violently) imposed atheism on Russia in the form of the foundationally atheist philosophy of Marxist-Leninism. His brutal behavior as well as that of the Soviet (and other) Communist parties, is one the main arguments against the idea that atheism has something better to offer.

111: Dawkins approvingly quotes Steven Weinberg: “But for good people to do evil things, it takes religion” (p. 283). **Fallacy of suppressed evidence**: while there is truth in what Weinberg says, is it only religion that does this? What about Communism and Fascism? What about racism, as in Rwanda, or the exploitation in the Third World? This ‘sound bite’ sounds good only because it ignores much else that needs to be considered. It is also an example of the **fallacy of over simplification**.

112: In reference to teachers of suicide bombing, Dawkins writes, “The take-home message is that we should blame religion itself, not religious extremism – as though that were some kind of terrible perversion of real, decent religion” (p. 345). **The fallacy of appeals to the extreme, or unrepresentative sample or hasty generalization.** Dawkins uses an extreme example, from one religion to try to force us to accept his claim that all religion in itself is bad. His sample size (even in the entire book) is much too small to support such a far reaching conclusion about something as old and wide-spread as religion. There is a lack of proportion between the evidence presented and the conclusions drawn.

112 a: **Non sequitur**: Dawkins fails to provide an inherent link between the Extremist practices of one religion, and the inner character of all religion. His argument is rhetorical, not rational, based on our revulsion to the thought of suicide bombing.

113: “But religious faith is an extremely potent silencer of rational calculation, which usually seems to trump all the others . . . But it is also because it discourages questioning by its very nature. (p. 346). **Fallacy of appealing to unknowable statistics**: if this is true then it means that religion has committed more acts of repressing rational questioning than any other force, including patriotism, ideologies such as Communism and Fascism, political systems such as monarchy etc. We cannot possibly know this – one way or the other. Rationally, this statement is a meaningless piece of rhetoric designed to arouse our emotions more than to appeal to our analytical skills.

113 a: **Argument by selective evidence**: Dawkins either does not know or is suppressing evidence of the great rationalist traditions in Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism. There are other, serious philosophical issues involved here, e.g. extreme rationalism, moderate rationalism, irrationalism which he either ignores or suppresses. He seems unaware of the close connection between the development of rationalism and the history of Christian and Jewish thought.

114: “If children were thought taught to question and think through their beliefs . . . it is a good bet that there would be no suicide bombers” (p. 248). The **fallacy of over simplification**: willingness to engage in suicide bombing – which was pioneered in our time by the Tamil Tigers for political not religious purposes – is more complex than a simple matter of religion. Otherwise suicide bombing would be a constant factor in all parts of the world.

114 a: **Fallacy of proving too much**: On the basis of Dawkins' statement, we would have to conclude the people who do not question their faith are all ready to become suicide bombers. Yet they do not. Why? How does Dawkins explain the fact that they do not commit such acts?

115: Dawkins refers to "the long-term psychological damage inflicted by bringing the child up Catholic in the first place" (p. 356). **Fallacy of unsupported assertion**: Dawkins presents no evidence to support his claims about "long-term psychological damage." A truly scientific claim of this kind would require evidence based on comparative inter-cultural testing of both long-term and short-term. Rather than provide this, Dawkins commits the **fallacy of anecdotal evidence** in which he tells how his remark received a round of applause. This is also an example of the **fallacy of popular appeal**. The fact that people applauded his statement is no logical proof that his statement is correct. It is also a blatant example of **self-contradiction**: Dawkins demands that religious people document even claim with scientific and/or rational arguments – yet fails to do so here. For example, he demands that the teachers of suicide bombers follow their own advice (p. 345) yet does not do so himself.

116: "... regardless of whether she was a willing victim or not, there is strong reason to suppose that she would not have been willing if she had been in full possession of the facts" (p. 369). The **fallacy of begging the question and circular argument**: Dawkins supposed syllogism runs like this: (1) People in full possession of the factors do not volunteer to be sacrifices; (2) X volunteered to be a sacrifice; (3) Therefore X was not in full possession of the facts. How do we know this? Because people in full possession of the facts do not volunteer to be sacrifices and so on ad infinitum. He pre-supposes what he is supposed to prove.

116 a: **Unsupported assumption**: Dawkins assumes that he is in possession of "the facts," i.e. that his materialist understanding is the only possible understanding for rational people. Ironically, this assumption is not scientific because it cannot be proven scientifically, i.e. by experiment. His assumption is **self-refuting**.

117: "Historically, religion aspired to explain our existence and the nature of the universe in which we find ourselves" (p. 89). **Fallacy of reductionism**: Dawkins reduces religion to one simple function – explaining our existence – but it is not obvious at all that this is its only function. There is also the **fallacy of selective reading**: this statement is based on a strictly literal reading of some scriptures. But what about the other, non-literal ways of reading these same passages? Dawkins provides no reasons to discard them. As already noted, by the 3rd Century AD, Origen argued against literalist readings of scripture.

118: "Religion's power to console doesn't make it true" (p. 394). Dawkins is correct here, but his being correct points to a **fallacy of inconsistency** throughout his whole book when he tries to argue on that on the basis of the 'crimes' committed in the name of religion, religious belief is false, and that belief in God is a "delusion," i.e. is not true. If

religion's power to console doesn't make it (scientifically) true then crimes committed in the name of religion cannot make it false.

119: General remark: : Epistemologically, the new atheists are extreme rationalist and empiricists, they all agree that only empirical sense knowledge can count as knowledge, and that reason is the only source of knowledge. **The problem is they constantly violate this standard themselves in the pursuit of their arguments, i.e. their work is marred by a foundational inconsistency.** In addition to all their other short-comings, their works lack self-coherence.

III. "THE END OF FAITH" BY SAM HARRIS

120: "there seems to be a problem with some of our most cherished beliefs: they are leading us inexorably to kill one another. A glance at history, or at the pages of any newspaper . . ." (p. 12). **Fallacy of overstatement:** "the word "inexorably" i.e. unavoidably, suggests that religion actually causes murder/war in all cases, i.e. there is a necessary causal relationship between religion and war. The very existence of religiously pluralistic societies throughout history disproves Harris's grand claim. This also makes it a **fallacy of suppressed information**.

121: "Intolerance is thus intrinsic to every creed" (p. 13). **Fallacy of Ambiguity:** the word "intolerance" – especially in this context – is a catch-all term that includes a wide range of phenomena from simple disagreement to murderous persecution. What does Harris really mean? Does he object to disagreement in regards to ideas – then science too is intolerant and the argument of his book is caught in a vast **self-contradiction**. Does he mean 'murderous persecution'? Then his statement is a false **overgeneralization**.

122: "Once a person believes – really believes – that certain ideas can lead to eternal happiness or its antithesis, he cannot tolerate the possibility that people he loves may be led astray . . ." (p. 13). **False cause:** Harris postulates a causal relationship between belief and an absolute unwillingness to let others believe differently. But if Harris is right, then he commits the **fallacy of proving too much**: if absolute, i.e. inflexible belief necessarily leads to such intolerance, then the new atheists themselves are intrinsically intolerant, as would be many scientists or other academics. This, in turn, weakens his argument for the supremacy of science, i.e. leads him to the **fallacy of self-refutation**.

123: Regarding "religious moderates" (p. 14), Harris writes, "I hope to show the very ideal of religious tolerance . . . is one of the principal forces driving us toward the abyss" (p. 15). **Self-contradiction:** on one hand Harris criticises religions for lack of tolerance (see # 121, #122), but on the other hand he rejects the idea of religious tolerance as a danger. **Fallacy of ambiguity:** the word "abyss" is so ambiguous and can cover so many possible means both literal and symbolic, it is impossible to know what Harris means; it allows him to escape any critique by switching to another meaning of the word. **Fallacy of unsupported assertion:** Harris claims we are heading toward "the

abyss” – but provides no credible evidence for this apocalyptic claim. We do not even know what kind of “abyss” he is referring to.

124: “The idea that any one of our religions represents the infallible word of the One True God requires an encyclopedia of ignorance of history, mythology . . .” (p. 16).

Genetic fallacy: the truth or untruth of an idea cannot be proven by pointing out its origins. An idea is true or untrue on it’s the merits of its claims, not on account of its ancestry. This fallacy pervades the books of Hitchens, Dawkins, Harris and Dennett.

124 a: **Non sequitur:** the conclusion that religious claims are false does not necessarily follow from the primitive beginnings of religion. Their claims may have primitive beginnings but some of them may be true nonetheless.

125: “The doors leading out of scriptural literalism do not open from the *inside*. The moderation we see among nonfundamentalists is not some sign that faith has evolved; it is, rather, the product of the many hammer blows of modernity” (p. 19). **False dilemma:** these are not the only two possible alternatives. The Baha’i doctrine of progressive revelation asserts that revelation evolves according to the historical and cultural circumstances. As these change, so does our understanding of revelation.

#125 a: **Error of fact:** symbolic, nonliteral ways of understanding the Bible were well developed long before modernity, e.g. Origen in the 2nd C AD. (“*De Principiis*“ 4.1.6, translated by Marcus Borg, “*Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously But Not Literally*“ (2001) and Augustine (5th C AD).

#125 b: **Over simplification or fallacy of exclusion:** Harris excludes the long and complex history of Biblical interpretation especially of the Old and New Testaments, e.g. Christ’s emphasis on mercy and forgiveness over necessarily strict adherence to the law. Harris does this so he can build up his **straw man argument** that religion is inherently literalist – and, therefore, open to all sorts of accusations that suit his argument.

126: “Religious moderation is the product of secular knowledge and scriptural ignorance – and it has no bona fides, in religious terms, to be on a par with fundamentalism” (p. 21). Harris repeats the errors of # 125 and makes the **unsupported assumption** that fundamentalism and literalism are the standard by which to assess all religion. This is one of the premises of the argument in *The End of Faith*. However, his attempts to justify this premise is based on a straw man argument.

127: “In fact every religion preaches the truth of propositions for which n evidence is even conceivable” (p. 23).

#1: Hitchens: **false alternatives**: “Either the gospels are in some sense literal truth, or the whole thing is essentially a fraud, and perhaps an immoral one at that.” (120)

4: The new atheists see inevitable enmity between religion and science, and no possibility of harmony, dialogue, let alone unification in one all-embracing supersystem of knowledge or world vision.

#4.1: They also assume an irresolvable conflict between faith and reason, a conflict that can only be won by either one or the other.

Dawkins refers to Anselm’s ontological proof which he rejects. He refers to Kant’s claim that Anselm’s “slippery assumption” (p. 107) is that existence is more perfect than non-existence. However, this is a **fallacy of false attribution**: no attributes of any sort can be attributed to non-existence (otherwise you reify it as something), but attributes like perfection can be attributed to existence even if only relatively.

...it is more parsimonious to conjure up, say, a ‘big bang singularity’ (p. 101).

THE GOD DELUSION

There are three things to be said about this book:

A) It provides *some* legitimate critiques about the mis-use of religion, especially of religious fanaticism and thus serves as a warning to all people of faith to avoid this path.

B) Philosophically and logically, this is a confused and inconsistent work that is especially misleading because of its effective use of rhetoric.

C) Ironically for an evolutionist, D seems to have no sense of history and liberally indulges in “presentism.” This gives him a wealth of easy targets without having to require any historical understanding from himself or his readers.

D) #1.1: “Explanatory monism” (Haught 89) rejects the notion that different kinds of explanations may be needed to adequately explain the existence of a phenomena. These explanations are different and complementary but are not in conflict.

*To explain the publication of a book, we need a (a) physical explanation about printing processes, paper etc which involves naturalistic **physical**

explanations; (b) **teleological explanations** in regards to the publisher's decisions to publish the book and make money, establish firm etc, (c) **psychological explanations** about the author's motives, goals, etc; (d) **methodological explanations** about the way the book's arguments are organised and why.

**None of these explanations are the same, all are needed to get a complete understanding of the phenomena, each adds something the other cannot provide and they are not in conflict.

*** The workings of the universe can be explained by naturalistic methods, but for other aspects – such as the 'boundary questions' – other types of answers are needed, unless we wish to leave the very foundational questions unanswered.

#1: The most obvious problem is that his assumption about the scientific method is provable by the scientific method itself – and therefore cannot count as valid by D's own standards. He propounds a **SELF-CONTRADICTION** with his own position. By his standard, he too has faith in the very sense he rejects, i.e. belief without evidence.

#1.1: How can we set up a scientific experiment “to demonstrate that every true proposition must be based on empirical evidence rather than on faith”?
(Haught, 11)

#1.2: there are other forms of knowledge, e.g. the evidence that some loves me is difficult to measure scientifically, the value of something or someone to us personally, aesthetically, i.e. interpersonal experience, our sense of justice, - these things can be supported by reason(s) but the importance of the experience cannot be reduced to objective and objectively measurable reasons.

#1.3: This leads to their **STRAW MAN ARGUMENT**, i.e. the reduction of the concept of God to a (a) lawgiver and (b) cosmic engineer & designer. This completely leaves out the personal aspects of God and the accompanying subjective experiences.

#1.4:

#2: He also makes an assumption about reality – that it can only be known in this way. This, too, is not provable by the criteria he advocates. Here, too he engages in a **SELF-CONTRADICTION** with his own position.

E) He also assumes that reality has only one – physical – dimension, i.e. he denies “supernaturalism”, i.e. he makes the transition from a methodological naturalism to an ontological or metaphysical naturalism which asserts that physical nature is all that exists. This is where problems start. Whereas methodological naturalism does not necessarily

lead to atheistic conclusions, ontological naturalism does. Ontological naturalism is a philosophical extension of methodological naturalism into metaphysics.

Methodological naturalism explains natural phenomena by strictly natural means; it does not reject or accept the existence of supernatural entities.

1: D. has left science behind and entered the realm of philosophy. He provides a materialist interpretation of methodological naturalism.

#2: **LOGICAL SELF-CONTRADICTION**: D tries to avoid the implications of his position: “No scientist has ever suggested that a child is a ‘chemical mutation.’ ” (373)

#2.1: Give his denial of any supernatural aspects of life, God, or soul, i.e. that life only has the physical aspects, then each human being is in the last analysis only a chemical reaction, or ‘mutation.’ It is disingenuous to feign outrage as he does. This is a direct logical outcome of his rejection of “supernaturalism.” It is also a consequence of his reductionism:

* Science explains complex things in terms of the interactions of simpler things, ultimately the interactions of fundamental particles. I (and I dare say you) think it is a beautifully simple idea that all things are made of fundamental particles . . . (176)

* The second sentence tells us that “all things” are made of fundamental particles without any “supernatural” remainder, see his denial of supernaturalism.

#3: **SELF-CONTRADICTION**: D’s demand for evidence of everything and science’s basic trust that (a) the universe is rationally explicable, (b) that our experiments etc are capable of discovering this truth.

#3.1: **NON SEQUITUR**: On evolutionary principles this trust is not a logical consequence: if the mind is a product of mindless evolutionary processes, why should we trust it when it comes to any beliefs not directly connected with our survival?

4: According to D., God is a hypothesis in the scientific sense. This is simply false. A scientific hypothesis is one that is amenable to scientific disproof or verification. Since God is not a natural object, such verification is impossible. Ergo, ‘God’ is not a scientific hypothesis.

#####

1- “A theist believes in a supernatural intelligence who, in addition to his main work of creating the universe in the first place, is still around to oversee and influence the subsequent fate of his initial creation.” (p.39)

1.1) the God Hypothesis: “there exists a superhuman, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it including us.” (52)

1.2) “I decry supernaturalism in all its forms . . .” (57)

1.3) “I shall suggest that the existence of God is a scientific hypothesis like any other. Even if it is hard to test in practice, it belongs to the same TAP or temporary agnosticism box as the controversies over the Permian or Cretaceous extinctions. God’s existence or non-existence is a scientific fact, discoverable in principle if not in practice.” (72 – 73; also 96)

#1: RE (1.2) & (1.3) This shows that D is embarked on a philosophical or ideological venture of persuasion and not a scientific argument.

#2: **SELF-CONTRADICTION**: There is no way to prove scientifically – i.e. by physical, i.e. experimental means that supernaturalism is false or true. Or, alternatively, there is no way to falsify the statements that ‘Supernaturalism is untrue.’ Furthermore, there are no observations to prove such a claim. How could natural i.e. scientific means be used to observe the presence of a “supernatural” Being? What natural i.e. physical does he propose, even in theory, to collect evidence about the existence or non-existence of a non-material entity?

#3: Thus his claim that “the existence of God is a scientific hypothesis” is untenable. His claims to be scientific on this issue are purely rhetorical – a pattern found throughout the book.

#4: His rejection of supernaturalism shows his unadmitted assumption, i.e. naturalism, i.e. physicalism, i.e. the belief that only what is physical either as matter or energy, measurable, observable and repeatable is real. This may be a working hypothesis for scientific procedure, but as an ontological or metaphysical claim about reality it is a philosophical stance that is not subject to scientific proof. His position is no more or less philosophical than the claims of super-naturalism.

#4.1) IOW, his whole position is based on his personal philosophical preferences which he likes to disguise as science.

4.2: By his own rejection of faith as “belief without evidence” (232) he is bound to reject his own untested and untestable position regarding his foundational assumptions.

#5: D’s definition of faith as “belief without evidence” (232) i.e. an epistemological definition, is problematical because D cannot actually empirically/scientifically establish his belief in science as seen above. Also, like every scientific generalization it is underdetermined by evidence and therefore the

knowledge to make an absolute statement is always missing. This brings us to faith in the existential sense, i.e. commitment – and of this D also has plenty.

#5.1: He is unaware of other definitions of faith, i.e. an existential definition of faith as personal commitment; faith is not necessarily irrational, as he presents it. It does not correlate with the notion of faith as ‘basic trust’ or with Tillich’s “ultimate concern.” Nor does it correlate with the Bahai definition: “By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds.” (Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v3, p. 549)

* The Bahai definition does not oppose ‘faith’ and ‘knowledge’ and relates faith to action, thereby avoiding ‘hypocrisy’, i.e. the profession of faith without appropriate action.

** **Progressive revelation** reminds us that all definitions of faith are appropriate at all times and in all conditions.

#5.2: D.’s definition of faith “belief without evidence” (232) is without Biblical Foundation: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1). Evidence is part of faith here, though the evidence does not meet **D’s positivist criteria for evidence**. (That itself cannot be proven scientifically.)

#5.3: D’s view of faith as “belief without evidence”(232) is a form of fideism, which relies on faith rather than reason and to the exclusion or disparagement of reason. Though some parts of some religions may have fideistic tendencies, fideism is not a necessary part of all religion. The RC Church lists it as a theological error and fideism is not compatible with the Bahai definition of faith. **OVERGENERALIZATION.**

* It is also an example of **FALSE ALTERNATIVES**: the choice is not between “belief without evidence” and D’s positivism. Other positions such as moderate Rationalism (the Bahai view) are possible.

2) D’s poor grasp of his own ideas – or his betrayal of his commitment to naturalist science when it suits his purposes – is his espousal of memes as the supposed carriers or replicators of ideas, cultural habits, beliefs, attitudes of “cultural imitation.” (223)

2.1) Memes are no more than an analogy and D assumes that we can make scientifically meaningful i.e. testable analogies between biological and cultural processes. He provides no proof that this is true nor can he. Memes (a) do not exist in space, (b) are not physical, (c) have no physically separate or component parts, (d) are not involved in any measurable energetic processes within themselves, amongst themselves or with other beings, (e) do not show, action, agency, e.g. competition, accommodation, (f) no internal energy source of their own, (g) have no inherent interests or even self-interests (all their interests are

- (i) attributed to them externally), (h) have no intention and cannot act intentionally, have no internal structure, (j) have no inherent reproductive capacity.

*This means that the proposition that memes are analogies of genes is **UNTESTABLE** by the scientific method demanded by Dawkins, Dennett and others. It is not a scientific concept by their own standards. How memes even be involved in a laboratory test?

Because memes have none of the essential attributes of genes (see above) this is a **FALSE ANALOGY. The differences between them are too great and too numerous to allow valid inferences from one to the other.

*** Dawkins and Dennett indulge in a text-book case of **REIFICATION**, i.e. treating an idea, an abstraction, as if it were a real, concrete thing.

**** This in turn violates **OCCAM'S RAZOR** which Dawkins, Dennett, Harris like to invoke as a test of rationality: "do not multiply entities unnecessarily." Here they have invented a new entity, memes, because it allows them to present human intellectual life in biological, i.e. Darwinian Evolutionary terms. They like to use Occam's Razor to exclude God, but ignore this standard to include memes.

**** Dennett asks "Cui bono?" about memes i.e. **PATHETIC FALLACY**, i.e. treating inanimate things as if they were alive. Inanimate things, including ideas do not have interests, and therefore it is meaningless to speak of gain, loss, advantage or disadvantage in regards to them. These attributions are imposed upon them externally by people, but these attributions have no real (as distinct from mental) connection to anything inherent in a meme.

2.2) Memes are not testable, not quantifiable, consistent, intersubjective, repeatable – all of which D requires from an idea that is scientific. (McGrath, 128) They are not empirical. Furthermore, they are not necessary to explain how ideas spread, i.e. he violates Occam's Razor, which D likes to use to eliminate God. Memes are "functionally redundant" (McGrath 133) because we already know how ideas spread.

2.3) "[In memes] there is nothing obviously corresponding to chromosomes or loci or alleles or sexual recombination. The meme pool is less structured and less organized than the gene pool. Nevertheless, it is not obviously silly to speak of a meme pool in which particular memes might have a 'frequency' which can change as a consequence of competitive interactions with alternative memes." (223)

He simply ignores the major, essential differences between genes and memes and

then merely asserts the existence of meme pools. IOW, he never explains why we should accept memes even as hypotheses despite these major differences. He has not prepared the foundation of his argument on this whole subject but simply asserted their existence as a matter of faith, i.e. belief without evidence (232)

How can he criticize believers for belief in a non-observable, non-testable redundant God and then espouse meme-theory? He cannot live up to the standards he has set out for others.

*IOW, there is no scientific basis for meme theory or his theory of the transmission of religion that is based on memes.

3) In dismissing NOMA, he asks, “What on earth is a why question? . . . Not every English sentence beginning with ‘why’ is a legitimate question.” (80)

#3.1: He falls into a serious **NON SEQUITUR**: the fact that some why questions seem to have no meaning, does not mean that all why questions do not having meaning and that no such questions are legitimate. D of course wants us to believe that only why questions which admit of physicalist answers are meaningful, but this is merely his own positivist philosophical preference and does not necessarily say anything about other why questions.

#3.2: **Boundary questions**: Moreover, he is ignoring such why questions related to the principle of sufficient reason: “there must be a sufficient reason - causal or otherwise - for why whatever exists or occurs does so, and does so in the place, time and manner that it does.” This logical principle, which drives all scientific inquiry in the quest for necessary and sufficient explanations, can also be asked of other things, such as the universe itself: why is there something rather than nothing? i.e. why does the universe exist rather than nothingness. At this “limit question” or “boundary question” the scientific method becomes inadequate. Other examples are, why (for what purpose) was I born?; why did humankind appear on this planet?; why does the universe not explain itself? why do natural phenomena fall into rationally (or even mathematically) explicable patterns? What are the conditions that allow and/or are necessary for the existence of matter or complexity or evolution or physical laws in the first place?

4) about God: “Any entity capable of intelligently designing something as improbable as Dutchman’s Pipe (or a universe) would have to be even more improbable than a Dutchman’s Pipe.” (146)

4.1) This might be true *if* God were a natural entity and subject to all the limits inherent in natural entities. But God is “supernatural” (52). D’s argument depends on implicitly redefining God as a natural being subject to natural limitations.

4.2) He also assumes that ‘design’ means that God specifically, intentionally designed all particular beings. This is not necessarily the meaning of ‘design’ in

cases (see potentials and evolutionary actualization in SAQ).

Most obviously he presents no evidence for his assertion regarding improbability

4.3) “A God capable of continuously monitoring and controlling the individual status of every particle in the universe cannot be simple.” (178; also 176, 184)

1: this is a mere assertion without any supporting evidence. Given D’s own criteria of what constitutes knowledge, how could he know this? How can he know this is not possible for a supernatural entity not restricted by the limitations of material existence?

2: Counter-example: the law of gravity is very simple and yet it controls the actions of all physical objects; it is omnipresent.

#3: D never defines ‘simple’: e.g. ontologically simple means God has no separable parts, no distinction between essential and accidental attributes or principles such as essence and existence, i.e. God has absolute unity, is not composite, not independent.

4: D’s claim assumes that God must be like natural entities which would have to be infinitely complex to deal with an infinite amount of information in time. By his own definition of God as “supernatural”(52) he has already undermined his position. If God were a natural object, D’s claim might be true, but since God is Not a natural object, his unsupported assertion cannot be accepted.

4.4) D. also says, “God or any intelligent decision taking calculating agent would have to be highly improbable in the very same statistical sense as the entities he is supposed to explain.” (176)

#1: How does D know that God is a “calculating agent”, i.e. calculates in the discursive manner? Perhaps God has direct and immediate insight, analogous to our immediate knowledge of how our limbs feel. Since God is not in time, or space His thought process – if He has any in the human sense – would be completely different from ours or anything we can imagine.

#2: Statistics apply to natural objects . . . and since God is not natural, it is impossible to develop meaningful probability statements about God. This is **CATEGORY MISTAKE** or **COMPARING UNLIKES MISTAKE** (see also 178) , i.e. has no meaning when analysed rationally.

4.5) Re the infinite regress (101), “it is more parsimonious to conjure up, say, a ‘big bang similarity’ or some other physical concept as yet unknown.” (101)

6.2) Only a supernatural entity *can* be the terminator or start of this infinite regress of causes because it alone is not subject to a necessary and sufficient cause. Only a supernatural being can be a “natural terminator” of such a regress.

7) 8.) Ontological argument: D forgets that Godel revived it in the 20th C.

8.1) He correctly cites Kant’s point that Anselm assumes that existence is more perfect than non-existence. This is true – but that in itself does not make Anselm’s assumption invalid. D. has not proven that it is – and that is what is needed to achieve his goal of disproving Anselm. He simply makes unsupported assertions.

9) “Historically, religion aspired to *explain* our own existence and the nature of the universe in which we find ourselves. In this role it is completely superseded by science.” (389)

9.1) At one time, religion did in fact aspire “to *explain* [in one sense of the word] our own existence and the nature of the universe” in terms that made sense according to the state of human knowledge – just as today’s science explains the same subjects in a way appropriate to our state of knowledge.

#1: ‘Explain’ can mean both ‘how’ things happen and ‘why’ things happen, and the ‘why’ can refer to ‘causes’ and ‘goals or ‘purpose.’ Science can deal with ‘how’ and ‘why/cause’ but religion also deals with ‘why/purpose’ which beyond the capacity of science to determine. Religion now tends to focus on the latter.

2: D. is also superficial enough not to recognise that the creation stories – which are scientifically false – may have value in illustrating our relationship to God. Their scientific falsity is irrelevant to this purpose.

10) D. tries to disprove “the argument from beauty” (110) but this is tilting at windmills, a STRAW MAN. No philosopher has ever advanced this ‘argument’ – which is more a sentiment than a rational proof of God’s existence.

11) He also attacks the “argument from personal ‘experience’ ” – which he interprets as mental delusions and hallucinations, by-products of the brain’s capacity for simulations. Here again he is attacking a STRAW MAN: no philosopher has advanced personal experience as an objective, i.e. trans-subjective proof for God’s existence compelling for even those who lack the experience.

#1: To do so would be an obvious case of OVER-GENERALIZING from too little evidence; the evidence is not sufficient for the conclusion.

#2: An individual may find such an experience convincing but this personal experience cannot by itself compel rational consent without additional, objective evidence and/or reasoning. Being convincing/persuasive and being correct are not the same things.

logical

#3:D. then raises the problem of 70,000 witnesses at Fatima – which he admits is “not easy to explain” (116) – and tries to discredit it by wondering why the rest of the world also didn’t see the sun from the heavens’ ” (116). This second question only makes sense if D. assumes that the event was literal, a natural and not a super-natural or even ‘merely’ psychological event.(see page 117] He has no evidential or rational warrant to make such an assumption, especially about a religious, i.e. intrinsically spiritual event.

4: D then quotes Hume on miracles: “No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to explain.” (117) [Enquiry, Sect, X, parag.91]

#4.1) BEGGING THE QUESTIONS: If our task is to establish whether or not a miracle has occurred, how can we judge whether one event is “more miraculous” than the other? This test is circular, leading to nothing but competing claims about which event is more miraculous without any means of resolution. (We might also get an infinite regress of miracles.)

12) D attacks what he calls “the argument from scripture” (117). Here we can agree that these proofs are not philosophical but theological and that D does not like Christian theology.

13) “no known culture lacks some version of the time-consuming, wealth-consuming hostility-provoking rituals, the ant-factual, counter-productive fantasies of religion. . . . Universal features of a species demand a Darwinian explanation.” (194)

13.1) “The general theory of religion as an accidental-by-product – a misfiring of something useful – is the one I wish to advocate.” (218) The idea is that a child’s brain is “vulnerable to infection by mental viruses” (218) and this carries on into society at large,

#1: **NON-SEQUITUR**: the fact that religion is universal does not “demand a Darwinian explanation.” Other explanations are equally possible: economic and/or Marxist; the state of knowledge; structural-linguistic (binaries); political; even stupidity. To make his case that we must have a Darwinian explanation requires him to eliminate the other possibilities.

#2: If a behavior is universal, it cannot be accidental. (The exceptions, if any, would be accidental.) Nor can it be a by-product. If a “misfiring” (217) in the brain is universal, in what way can it be distinguished from a normal brain function?

3: **BEGGING THE QUESTION**: D shows no evidence that his “gullible child” (218) theory, i.e. the gullibility of children is connected to religion. The connection works only if we assume that these two phenomena are related or capable of being linked in an analogy.

4: To establish a valid analogy would require us to demonstrate that they share at least one significant similarity sufficient to outweigh all other significant differences. If we examine religion as a whole, we observe so many differences from children’s gullibility that any serious comparison is pointless.

5: he compares the love for God with the “misfiring” in a moth and its subsequent flight into a flame. But there is no “misfiring” in a moth whose Brain functions normally but at a situationally non-adaptive time. The analogy is no tenable,

14) “the symptoms of an individual infected by religion may be startlingly reminiscent of those more ordinarily associated with sexual love. This is an extremely potent force in the brain and it is not surprising some viruses have evolved to exploit it.” (216)

13.1) Again we observe D.’s unsupported use of comparisons and analogies. He simply asserts – and expects us to accept the assertion without him giving any examples of how they are identical or similar.

15) **PRESENTISM**: one of D’s persistent faults in his critique of religion is presentism, the judging of the past by the standards of the present.

14.1) Speaking of a sacrificed Inca girl, he says “ that there is strong reason to suppose she would not have been willing if she has been in full possession of the facts . . . suppose she had known the sun is really a ball of hydrogen. . . ”(369)

#1: What are these strong reasons?

#2: What does this prove except that in different times, places and circumstances, people act differently? The Inca’s are not blameworthy for not knowing the sun is hydrogen, nor for acting upon their beliefs. The claim that they should have known better and acted on our standards of informed consent is unrealistic.

#3: To recognise that these cultural differences exist does not mean we have to accept or perpetuate these practices today.

4: To blame religion for lack of knowledge in past times is to arbitrarily focus on one aspect of the complexities of culture.

See also 23.1, # 2

15.2) D – like fundamentalists of all kinds – does not recognise that religion too is evolutionary or developmental and that the requirements and needs of different times were different from ours.

#1: Nor does he recognise that moral ideals have to survive in the real world too and may require actions that seem contradictory. (E.g. Allies in WW II)

16) **LITERALISM**: Not only does D read any and all scripture in the most literal way, he also insists on identifying all religion with fundamentalism. He says he is “hostile to fundamentalist religion” (321) but as seen in this chapter (titled What’s Wrong with Religion?) his target is all religion (and its alleged child abuse). The examples he consistently uses show that he equates all religion with fundamentalism.

16.1) D says we should not confuse fundamentalism with passion (320). His passion is not fundamentalist – so he says – despite the fact that he cannot prove his foundational statements about science and supernaturalism and takes them on faith, i.e. as a basic commitment. He indulges the SPECIAL PLEADING fallacy.

16.2) D is every bit as literalist in his reading of scripture as the fundamentalists he excoriates. Like them he is shallow i.e. thinks there is nothing beneath the surface of a text – or of nature – for us to discover. (Haught, 30).

16.3) He also **misses progressive revelation**, i.e. the notion that there may be different ways to read a text in different contexts, i.e. different times, places etc. and by means of different techniques and from different perspectives. D’s one-eyed literalism

#1: RE Abraham and Isaac: “if not as literal fact, how should we take the story? As an allegory? Then an allegory for what? Surely nothing praiseworthy. As a moral lesson? But what kind of moral could one derive from this appalling story?” (275)

#2: The lesson may be: ‘let nothing detract you from following that which is most important to you.’ (A psychological or existential understanding.) A religious understanding may be that God is our primary obligation. Or, ‘There are higher obligations in this life than your own feelings and preferences.’ These are all very salutary lessons.

The ‘horrible’ story is a literary device to make the story memorable. Complaining about the story makes as much sense as complaining about the slaughter in Hamlet, i.e. it shows ignorance about the nature of literature and the engagement of imagination.

#3: From the perspective of evolution and progressive revelation we might say: in the time and circumstances of Abraham, loyalty to the tribe's God was more important to the survival of the tribe (cohesion etc) than anything else. Under those circumstances, his actions had survival value, and taught an important lesson to everyone as did Titus Manlius Torquatus who had his own son executed for breach of military orders. Sometimes such things may be necessary . . .

#4: "They cannot get away with it, not even if they employ that favourite trick of interpreting selected scriptures as 'symbolic' rather than literal. By what criterion do you decide which passages are symbolic, which literal?"

#4.1: Here D is trying to defend his literalist, i.e. fundamentalist reading of all scripture. He gives no reason why the symbolic readings are illegitimate, i.e. no historical grounds, no internal literary grounds, no logical grounds. IOW, he gives no reason why we are obligated to accept his literalist/fundamentalist readings. He then tries to change the subject by asking how do we decide which reading is literal and which symbolic.

#4.2: It simply does not occur to D that at our point in evolution, it is appropriate to take the whole Bible as symbolic. Sections of it may turn out to be historical, but that is accidental to the Bible's chief value for us. (cf. Frye's reading of the Bible, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C04E0DD1339F932A25757C0A964948260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all>) See demythologizing; existential interpretations.

17) D is contemptuous of those who "pick and choose among the scriptures for the nice bits and reject the nasty." (275). D does the same, selecting the nasty parts and rejecting the good parts when he claims that "modern morality wherever else it comes from does not come from the Bible."(279) . **SELF-CONTRADICTION.**

18) **BIASED SAMPLING:** : in his detailing of sins committed in the name of religion, D ignores the fact that Communism – which was programmatically atheist from elementary school upward as well as philosophically atheist from its foundations – was equally murderous as seen in Russia, China, North Korea, Cambodia, Eastern Europe etc. in the 20th C.

#1: A French academic study (The Black Book of Communism, 846 pages) details how Communism is responsible for app. 100 million deaths in the 20th C alone. IOW, there is no historical evidence to suggest atheism leads to moral superiority or to greater compassion.

18.1) "Not all absolutism is derived from religion. Nevertheless, it is pretty hard to defend absolutist morals on grounds other than religious ones." (266)

1: There is plentiful evidence in the 20th C that absolute morals have been

integral part of the programmatic atheism of Communism, i.e based on ideological and philosophical ground, or political grounds.

19) “But religious faith is an especially potent silencer of rational calculation, which usually seems to trump all others.” (346)

#1: **HASTY GENERALIZATION**: What evidence does D have that religion is “especially potent silencer” of rationality? What evidence that it is more potent than (a) race, (b) politics/ideology, (c) money, or (d) nationalism?

20) D claims that bringing children up in a religion is child abuse (365) and presents his atheism as a way of protecting children. He quotes with approval:

“. . . children have a right not to have their minds addled y nonsense, and we as a society have a duty to protect them from it. So we should not allow more parents to teach their children to believe than we should allow parents to knock their children’s teeth out or lock them in a dungeon.(367)

1: **RHETORIC**: the appeal to emotion and the suggested equivalence of teaching a child a faith and physical assault.

#2: **FALSE ANALOGY**: The differences between religious training and physical assault are to great to allow a meaningful comparison or analogy. The negative results of physical abuse are visible to all and can be ascertained medically while the ill effects of religious training are largely a matter of perception and belief.

#3: D’s claim that society has a “duty to protect” children from religious education shows dictatorial willingness to enforce his opinions by state interference in parenting and parental rights.

#3.1: **SELF-CONTRADICTION**: D is willing to use state power to enforce his plan to protect children from religious training – but is outraged when Christian parents do the same to protect their children from views they consider repugnant. (377 +)

“Our society, including the non-religious sector, has accepted the preposterous idea that it is normal and right to indoctrinate tiny children in the religion of their parents . . .”

#3.2: He provides no reasons why it would be better to label them “atheist” or “agnostic” child.

#3.3: D’s **lack of tolerance** i.e. his dictatorial streak, is evident in his unwillingness to accept that others may not agree with him. He shows himself as Intolerant as the fundamentalist and evangelicals.

He finds this palatable because he sees a false equivalent between physical assault and providing religious training.

#4: **UNSUPPORTED ASSUMPTION**: D assumes that learning his beliefs will lead to better people, but he gives no reason why this will be so – and the Communist experience is strong evidence that it will not.

21) “These faiths are mutually incompatible.” (382) Again D sides with the fundamentalists and evangelical, as he does in his literalism. In this way he contributes to religious tension and animosity. He fails to consider the view that religions are essentially one and that all have the same basic purpose, as taught in the Baha’i Writings.

22) **NON SEQUITURS**: D’s subject is whether or not there is a God. Yet he persistently engages in arguments that have nothing to do with the existence of God or some supernatural entity, and focuses instead on arguments about God’s nature or the way people think God is useful.

22.1) It is totally irrelevant to the subjects of God’s existence whether or not God is (a) needed to be good (259), (b) consolation (404), (c) inspiration or (d) a burka that restricts our vision and understanding.

1: None of these arguments about the short-comings of religion have any logical relevance to the topic of God’s existence or lack thereof – and that is the key issue:

is God a delusion or not?

#2: IOW, D’s conclusion – that God does not exist – does not follow from his evidence.

23) D rejects the argument that “without God, morals are relative and arbitrary.” (267)

23.1) Rather than support his claim, D attacks those think that morals must be anchored in religion. This is a **NON SEQUITUR**: arguing that our opponent is wrong does not make our viewpoint right.

23.2) Morals that are not anchored in God, the divine, are then by process of elimination anchored in human thought – which ultimately leaves us with various opinions. We have no exterior, object Archimedean standpoint from which to judge among opinions. Such an absolute, Archimedean standpoint is exactly what God provides. It is needed because morals that are endlessly under debate lose their function as guidance. Why shouldn’t we just follow our preferences, our advantages? Who says arbitrary choices are worse than reasoned or financially driven choices. Medic or mercenary – it’s all good.

#1: If morals have no final authority, then on what authority does D make his moral demands on the rest of us? His views are no more than his opinions and

no better or worse than anyone else's. By what authority does he demand state intervention to save children from religion? By what authority does he condemn the practices of the past?

#1.1: D tries to separate ethics from religion by grounding ethics in Evolution and 'altruism.' Here again we see the **GENETIC FALLACY** at work, i.e. he tries to reduce ethics to its evolutionary origins.

#1.2: However, ethics has obviously evolved beyond this simple genetic altruism: justice, love in all its dimensions, pursuit of truth (often 'counter-evolutionary') the self-control of lust, greed, envy, pride, wrath, sloth, gluttony (also 'counter-evolutionary') or the 7 virtues: prudence, temperance, courage, justice (cardinal virtues) love, hope, faith (theological virtues).

23.3) How can D et al explain their trust in their own mind's ability to devise a better system of morality? They make the SIMPLE ASSUMPTION that they can, i.e. **ASSUME THE CONSEQUENT** rather than proving it.

#2: Given his evolutionary framework, on what grounds (and authority) does D. condemn what has happened during the natural process of human evolution? See **PRESENTISM.**

The need for an absolute standard brings us to the necessity for the divine. How this divine is conceived is a separate issue.

23.4) "Fortunately, however, morals do not have to be absolute." (265)

#1: D has obviously not considered the consequences if moral rules were only suggestions, even reasonable ones. Ethics by nature entails what we are obligated to do and why.

24) **AD HOMINEM**: D's book is filled with ad hominem arguments. For example,

Even if it were true that we need God to be moral, it would of course not make God's existence more likely, merely more desirable (many people cannot tell the difference).

"shot" (267)

25: **GENETIC FALLACY**: D tries to discredit religion today by pointing to its 'low origins.' Here too progressive revelation has an answer, i.e. that things may develop beyond their initial conditions.

26:

“Religion is a label for in-group/out-group enmity . . . There really are genuine grievances and injustices and these seem to have little to do with religion; except that – and this is widely overlooked – without religion there would be no labels by which to decide whom to oppress and whom to avenge.” (294)

#1: Religion may certainly be used as labels –and this one of the uses Baha’u’llah objects to. However, the notion that without religion

* Their condescension to people of faith – a dangerous sign

2: **INCONSISTENCY**: “the very idea of religious tolerance – born of the notion that every human being should be free to believe whatever he wants about God – is one of the principal forces driving us toward the abyss” (Harris, 14-15; Haught, 9)

- This contradicts the pleas for tolerance for atheists etc. and their condemnation of religious persecution.

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3.1) This technique is supported by extreme **LITERALISM** in reading religious books, without showing any awareness that non-literal modes of understanding these texts have been established for many centuries. IOW, he selects the narrowest fundamentalist readings whereas as Christian fundamentalism for example is a small minority of Christians. The RC Church hasn’t held to literalism since Augustine in the 5thC!

3.2) de-contextualizes them,

%%%

BREAKING THE SPELL - DENNET

- 1) D's book is based on several foundation stones. The first pillar on which his arguments rest is his belief that science, i.e. naturalist, empiricist, positivist science with its denial to any supernatural, non-material levels of reality or entities is able to provide the only necessary and sufficient explanations we need.
 - 1.1) Hence he is committed to objectivity, observability, predictability, testability, measurability, repeatability, falsifiability, the experimental method, universality, independence of culture, i.e. the hypothetico-deductive method. (McGrath, 128-9)
 - 1.2) The problem is that naturalism itself cannot be verified in this way: How do we design an experiment to prove that (a) the physical level is the only level of reality? (b) how could we falsify the hypothesis 'Supernaturalism is true'? (c) how could we verify scientifically the claim that 'Naturalist explanations are the only true and/or necessary and sufficient explanations?' (d) how could we experimentally verify that naturalism provides the only valid source of knowledge?
 - 1.3) As a method, naturalism presents no problems, i.e. it is a choice to draw information from and limit explanations to natural phenomena. However, presented as an ontology, i.e. theory of reality, or as an epistemology, i.e. theory of what is knowable and how, naturalism entangles itself in inconsistency with its own principles. It cannot meet the criteria it lays out for true knowledge. It is **SELF-UNDERMINING**.
 - 1.4) D does not address this issue in his reflections on science.
- 2) The second pillar is D's belief that religion should be investigated scientifically like any other phenomena. He rejects Gould's theory of "non-overlapping magisteria"(30) and concludes that "Religion is not out-of-bounds to science" (53) and can provide an adequate understanding of the subject by naturalist methods and principles alone. Indeed, "we have particularly compelling reasons for investigating the biological basis of religion *now*."(71-72; original emphasis).
 - 2.1) He ignores the question of adequacy to the material being studied: science can certainly study the material-physical aspects of religion, i.e. practices, rituals,

laws, organizations, etc. i.e. the external, objectively accessible aspects of religion. However, these aspects concern only the outer, external appearance of religion but not its inner aspects.

2.2) These inner aspects refers to such issues as spiritual truths (e.g. the command to love; there are different kinds of truth, insight), the experience of religion (we are always external to others' experience), the meaning that religion provides, theological-moral questions e.g. problem of evil, the nature of good, virtue, values, matters of ultimate concern, beauty. These are sources of the experience of religion. Science is not adequate to study the supernatural world-view (in light of science's limitations in this regard). Nor is it able to pass judgement on a host of theological issues that are integral to religion.

2.3) IOW, from a Baha'i perspective, science can study "the exoteric forms of the divine teachings" (SAQ 75) but the heart of religion concerns issues not amenable to naturalistic study of objects that are matter or energy, not quantifiable, not falsifiable, not repeatable, not objective etc. Science can give partial accounts of how these factors affect observable behaviors but it cannot deal with them in themselves. D's approach really **evades the substance** of religion which is made up of these inner, non-objective aspects.

2.4) Nothing in the Baha'i Writings hinders a scientific study of religion provided we remember that such a study is (a) partial and (b) cannot be exhaustive. What is called for is a dialogue among various approaches to the study of religion.

2.5) On this issue D is guilty of the **FALLACY OF COMPOSITION**, i.e. he mistakes a part for the whole and draws conclusions about the whole on the basis of the part.

3) The third pillar of D's book is the meme-theory. According to D, religion is one of the "cultural replicators" (78) called memes which are the cultural counterparts of genes, which 'take over' human brains as viruses do in order to gain advantage and replicate themselves. This accounts for universal spread of religion (93). Memes behave like all other organisms in evolution, seeking advantage by colonizing 'new territories,' seeking replication, mutating, struggling for existence/survival, the adoption of "new tricks" (156).

3.1) Meme theory leads D into a vast **SELF-CONTRADICTION** that underlies his entire book: he espouses methodological and ontological naturalism on one hand, yet he also believes that memes are real.

3.2) Memes are no more than an analogy and D assumes that we can make scientifically meaningful i.e. testable analogies between biological and cultural processes. This is illustrated by the following statement, quoted from Dawkins: "The meme for blind faith secures its own perpetuation by the simple unconscious expedient of discouraging rational inquiry" (230). Also: "memes have resisted

extinction over the centuries”(269). In what sense can we say – and mean – that one idea resists anything?

3.3) One of the problems with meme theory is that memes are not in themselves alive and have no interests, i.e. no self-interest because they do not have even a rudimentary sense of self, vulnerabilities to protect or external interests to pursue. There is no way in which ‘self-interest’ or ‘advantage’ can apply to memes except as externally assigned attributes. Nor do memes ‘act’ – ‘resist,’ ‘seek,’ etc - except in a metaphorical sense. They do not seek to make the brain a “a better habitat for memes.” Hence D’s all important question of “Cui bono?”, “Who gains?” is as irrelevant to memes as it is to steel girders, a pebble; only living things can have genuine, i.e. inherent interests.

#1: This is a **FALSE ANALOGY**. There are simply too many differences between memes and even viruses: (a) the lack of DNA or RNA; (b) the lack of physical existence, no size (c) no chemical, bio-physical analysis of them is possible; (d) the lack of any measurable energetic processes within themselves, amongst themselves or with other beings; (e) do not show self-originated agency, e.g. competition, accommodation; (f) no internal energy source of their own; (g) have no inherent reproductive capacity; (h) no inherent goal.

#1.1: An examination of D’s statements about memes shows that inadvertently or by design, he attributes the following to them: (a) deliberative will; (b) intention and planning (230); (c) desire – to prevail over other memes (120) or “to secure its own perpetuation” (230); (d) needs (91);

#1.2: **SELF-UNDERMINING**: D’s reification of memes and attribution of action or agency to them is a product of his

HADD!

In other words, the theory of memes is no less a product of human imagination as religion.

#2: Given these characteristics memes are simply not objects that can be studied by naturalistic methods to which D is committed.

#3. Without the concept of memes, D’s entire project of studying religion naturalistically, i.e. biologically and in terms of evolution, is doomed to failure. His explanation of how religion originated, how it spreads and why it has such a tenacious hold on humans, how it spreads and develops different forms, depends on meme theory.

#4: We might also wonder of meme-theory is not the latest version of the gods, angels and demons in biological or evolutionary form as each of them seeks to possess our brains?

#5: According to D's meme theory, his own naturalistic beliefs are themselves nothing other than memes trying to establish their dominance in the human brain in order to oust religious memes. This is the **SELF-REFERENTIALITY PROBLEM** in D's book: if science, - and the meme of belief in memes - are also memes, there is no rational ground to grant the science meme any special status as an arbiter of truth.

product external science meme Even the attempt to make 'scientific criteria' the determiners about whether an idea is true or not is no more than the behavioural by-product of the 'science meme.' There is no objective reason, i.e. no Archimedean stand-point from which to judge that the science meme is any more truthful than the religion meme. To claim otherwise traps D in **SPECIAL PLEADING**, i.e. science is not a meme like all other ideas.

*Memes also lack definitional precision: how do we distinguish between the meme phenotype and genotype? The definition and Examples provided by D could refer to either - or both. Yet the clarity of this distinction is vital to all evolutionary theory since evolution occurs at the level of the genotype. Imprecision here makes any scientific use of evolutionary theory impossible.

allegiance to How can D speak of ***This, imprecision vis-à-vis phenotypes and genotypes involves D in a **SELF-CONTRADICTION** with his alleged methodological and ontological naturalism. evolutionary mechanisms at work when this basic distinction can't be made?

3.4) D also avoids the issue of where did the first meme come from? How did it arise? If it didn't come from somewhere outside humans (from what?), why are memes anything more than human thoughts and ideas?

3.5) **SELF-CONTRADICTION**: D's insistence on the naturalistic (hypothetico-deductive) method of acquiring scientific knowledge is not fulfilled by meme theory.

#1: Memes are not observable entities at the physical biological, chemical levels (McGrath 129). How can they be described in these 3 ways? How can they be quantified or shown to be independent of culture? They are not well-defined entities without any clear boundaries. By what scientifically describable mechanism are they transmitted? By

what study mechanism do they ensure accuracy of transmission? How can we structure of memes scientifically?

*D's demand for scientific methodology contradicts his support for and use of meme theory in his analysis of religion.

3.6) **OCCAM'S RAZOR**: Do we really need memes to explain how ideas and beliefs proliferate? What can memes explain that parental and societal teaching, books, oral traditions, political, economic/material conditions and requirements, institutions, books, modern mass media and even the rationality of an idea cannot explain? What about "reflective consciousness and deliberative will, memory and intention, curiosity and desire"? (David B Hart, "*Daniel Dennett Hunts the Snark*", January Snark, in "*First Things: A Monthly Journal of and Public Life*"; Issue: 169. 2007. Page Number: 30+) IOW, memes are a "mystification" like the Snark.

#1: For example, saying that naturalism and supernaturalism are two memes in competition for control of the human brain. What does this explain that has not been appropriately explained by other, more 'traditional' methods?

*D's explanation violates Occam's Razor (multiplying entities beyond necessity), one of the principles of methodological and ontological naturalism.

**D's account of the rise (through HADD's) and development of religion (though memes) has no genuine scientific basis whatever. D admits this: "I am not at all claiming that this is what science has established about religion . . ." (quoted in Wieseltier). Also (310)

- 4) **GENETIC FALLACY**: D's book is pervaded by the genetic fallacy, i.e. his belief that God's existence can be disproven by showing the natural sources of religions. This is also an example of a **NON SEQUITUR**, i.e. a fallacy of relevance, since there is no necessary connection between God's existence and the evolutionary origin of religious sensibility.

#1: HADD – hyperactive agent detection device [109]) involves us attributing agency (beliefs, knowledge, goals, desires action [110]) to objects in the environment. It means we take up the "intentional stance" (110) and treat a thing as an "intentional system" (110). Thus we experience the world as full of animated beings, including rocks, rivers, dead bodies etc. God is one of these false positives registered by our HADD's.

*Here is a **QUESTION BEGGING**: (1) God does not exist; (2) HADD's

give us false positives about the existence of God or gods; (3) Therefore, HADD's lead to erroneous belief in God. (3) does not follow because Conclusion is already assumed by D. The existence of HADD's (if they are real) do not by themselves say anything about the existence of gods or God.

D is aware of this but brushes it aside: "The goal of either proving or disproving God's existence is not very important." (quoted in Wieseltier, "The God Genome") This is **SELF-UNDERMINING: what is the point of calling atheists "brights" if the existence of God is still an open question: indeed, how could there be atheists instead of agnostics? What special insight do atheists then have to merit being called "brights."?

5) **RED HERRING**: D directs discussion away from the core issue of atheism and the belief in God – which is logically integral to atheism, especially programmatic atheism – to "belief in belief." (200) He writes, "Belief in belief in God makes people reluctant to acknowledge the obvious: that much of traditional lore about God is no more worthy of belief than the lore about Santa Claus or Wonder Woman" (210). He says many who claim to believe in God only believe in "the concept" (216) of God and that this belief is a 'good thing.'

#1: On this issue D makes numerous **UNSUPPORTED ASSERTIONS**: "Many people believe in God. Many more people believe in belief in God!" (222). He offers absolutely no evidence to prove this claim.

#2: **EVASION OF THE ISSUE**: D who does not recognise that belief in belief in God as a 'good thing' evades the issue of atheism and its consequences i.e. "belief In belief" is simply a red-herring that avoids the main issue of whether or not God exists, i.e. whether or not belief in God is warranted. Until the basic question of atheism – God exists or does not – is settled, other issues such as "belief in belief" are distractions. A belief cannot be disproven unless we disprove its substantial content.

#3: According to D. belief in belief (in God) is a retreat from religion towards atheism, an unconscious apostasy that does not know, or want to know what it is doing (210). He says that "some believers who consider themselves believers actually just believe in the concept of God" (216).

#3.1: **CONCEPTUAL AMBIGUITY**: D does not notice that "belief in the belief in God" does not necessarily reveal a move to atheism. Indeed, a commitment to the belief that belief in God is good for us individually and/or socially may also be seen as a move towards faith. Existentially, it is an intellectual commitment to God via the will, i.e. the person wills or assents that God exist. It is a commitment to an ideal, to live 'as if.' Christ recognised this kind of faith in Mark 9:24; the

father of a sick child said, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” Christ recognised his faith by curing the sick boy. Belief in belief is the form faith takes when the outer form of a religion appears problematic.

#3.2: D uses the distinction between ‘belief’ and ‘belief in belief in God’ to make create an artificial barrier between them: while ‘belief in God’ is recognition of God at first hand, ‘belief in belief in God’ is recognition of God at second hand.

#3.3: **CHANGING THE SUBJECT**: in moving from ‘belief in God’ to ‘belief in belief in God’, D is changing the subject from an ontological belief in a certain intentional object (God) to an epistemological belief about a different object, i.e. a *belief* in God. This allows D to avoid dealing with the substantive issue of atheism vs. theism, i.e. the existence of God.

6) D spends only a few pages on the subject of God’s existence which shows the extent to which he avoids then central issue. However, the fact that he does so at all shows that he is aware of the need to deal with the issue of God’s existence. He examines several traditional proofs of God.

#1: He begins with and spends the most time on the ontological argument, which was controversial from its very beginning but which has found supporters in modern times such as the great logician Goedel, as well as Hartshorne, Malcolm and Plantinga.

#1.1:

*D critiques the ontological argument also because “it is a long haul From that specification [of God’s simple existence] to a Being that is merciful or just or loving. . .” (242) **RED HERRING**: the issue is God’s existence, not God’s nature. If God exists – regardless of His nature – then the case for atheism is closed.

**Later D tries to retailer the definition of atheism to mean that an atheist is anyone who does not believe in “any kind of Person you could pray to . . . you’re an atheist in my book.”(245). This is a

FALLACY OF

DEFINITION, i.e. is too broad because D now defines atheism as belief in a certain kind of God, while allowing belief in another kind of

God, or supernatural entity or ground-of-being to qualify as atheism.

#2: D. considers the cosmological argument: “the universe must have a cause” (242) i.e. God. D asks, “What caused God?” This question is based on a **CATGEORY MISTAKE** of confusing a natural object like the universe or its contents with a (b) supernatural object such as God, Who is not amenable to

scientific study in the manner of natural objects which exist in time and space, are quantifiable, etc.) A category mistake puts things into a class into which they do not belong.)

*D asks “if something can be self-caused, why can’t the universe can’t be self-caused?” (242) This question repeats the **CATEGORY** **MISTAKE** in a new way: i.e. he is asking, why can’t a natural objects be like super-natural objects?

#3: D mentions the argument from design (apparently Paley’s version) and the anthropic principle according to which the existence of our particular universe and all life depends on such fantastic fine-tuning in physics that the probability of this fine-tuning being chance is very low, and the probability of a ‘fine-tuner’ or source of order, God, is correspondingly high.

*D does not mention that his philosophical hero Hume endorsed the design argument, i.e. his use of Hume’s statement about “natural religion” is a **MISREPRESENTATION**:

“As every enquiry, which regards religion, is of the utmost importance, there are two questions in particular, which challenge our attention, to wit, that *concerning its foundation in reason*, and that concerning its origin in human nature.

Happily, the first question, which is the most important, admits of the most obvious, at least, the clearest, solution. *The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion.*” (Introduction to The Natural History of Religion”, emphasis added.)

(<http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/humenathisti.html>)

7) D, like the other new atheists, tries to separate morality, ethics from religion. He points out that “belief in a reward in heaven can sometimes motivate acts of monstrous evil” (280).

#7.1: Like the other new atheists, D fails to come to terms with the massive evils inflicted in the 20th C alone by philosophies which espoused programmatic atheism as an integral part of their metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of man i.e. Communism. D’s assertions that atheists are happier, more moral, etc needs to be carefully examined in light of Communism’s historical record.

#1: Leaving out the atheist Communist record in a discussion of the supposed values of atheism is a **MISREPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE FALLACY** or a **FALLACY OF OMISSION**. It undermines D’s case about the value and benefits of atheism for society.

#7.2: In separating morality from religion, D shows he is committed to the idea that we can be good without God, that people “can be trusted and hence allowed to make their own informed choices. Informed choice! What an amazing and revolutionary idea!” (327).

#1: D’s suggestion sounds palatable simply by virtue of its **OMMISSIONS**, e.g. the problem of relativism. No one, not even Kant succeeded in establishing a satisfactory moral system based entirely on human reason alone – and the root problem is obvious: any process of reasoning that establishes a moral position can be challenged by a rival reasoning process. Kant’s categorical imperative says, “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” (*Fundamentals to a Metaphysic of Morals*)

1.1) This is eminently reasonable but what about people who have no desire for consistency or who find it against their interests, or who are too dull to be concerned about contradictions? It is based on respect for reason – but what about those who, for whatever cause, do not respect reason but

prefer to follow their interests? *There is nothing inherently compelling about the categorical imperative and without external consequences for compliance or non-compliance, it is effectively a dead letter.*

*The same is true of Kant’s other maxim that we should act “as to treat humanity . . . in every case as an end withal, never as a means.” only.” (*Fundamentals to a Metaphysic of Morals*) . This works for people who already have commitments to reason, fairness and respect but *there is nothing intrinsically compelling about it, i.e. without external consequences for compliance or non-compliance, it is essentially a dead letter.* This is the problem with all ethics based exclusively on reason without any consequences, i.e. rewards and punishments.

In the last analysis, this – and all other examples of purely reason-based ethics depend on other, pre-existing world-views and commitments, i.e. are **necessary but not sufficient to be the basis of practically workable social morality in which, on basic issues at least, everyone is on the same page – either by rational consent or by coercion.

*** If morality is not founded on religion, i.e. God, then we will soon have **the relativism problem** i.e. conflict over diverse ethical decisions and personal standards without any unifying ethical standard. We will have an endless clash of moral opinions – because that is all that exists – opinions. This makes social existence impossible.

******ARGUMENT BY HALF-TRUTH OR OMISSION:**

because he does not deal with the
‘consequences problem’ in morality. If each person makes his own moral
decisions according to their own reasoning, how are morals to be
enforced?

(See above about Kant) How can we ensure that moral precepts will not be
merely a dead letter? Relying only on people’s ‘tender’ consciences is
clearly unrealistic. Also, what’s to prevent people from changing
their minds about what is immoral after they have committed an act that
was – initially at least – immoral by their own standards? This
exacerbates the relativism problem which impacts on social stability
and public order.

8) D writes “those who have an unquestioning faith in the correctness of the moral
teachings of their religion are a problem” (295).

8.1) As the **Baha’i Writings** frequently suggest, un-reflective belief in anything
including science, religion and politics is problematic. That is an important aspect
of the Baha’i teaching of ‘independent investigation of truth.’ That kind of un-
reflective faith is no longer appropriate in the modern world because it is often
only imitation of parental and/or ancestral ways.

8.2) **SPECIAL PLEADING:** In light of events in Germany, Italy, Russia, China,
Etc. during the 20th C where un-reflective support for anti-religious and outright
atheist regimes made totalitarianism possible, it is special pleading to pick on
un-reflectiveness in religion as worthy of special note.

9) “The idea of heavenly reward is what motivates good people is demeaning and
unnecessary” (307) D also says, “If God is just, and merciful and forgiving and
loving . . . then anyone who loves God should want to be just and merciful and forgiving
and loving for *goodness’ sake*” (283; original emphasis). We would not need rewards like
heaven or punishment like hell.

#1: **COUNSEL OF PERFECTION, ARGUMENT BY DEMANDING THE
IMPOSSIBLE:** if we apply D’s principle that we should work for the intrinsic
goodness of an action rather than its consequences, then obviously atheists can
be held to the same standard, i.e. everyone. But what evidence is there that we can
do this? Historically they did not in Russia, China etc. IOW, it is questionable
whether human beings in general can live up to this standard and it is, therefore, a
form of **SPECIAL PLEADING** to make an exception of religionists by requiring
that they do. He gives no reasons why they should be made an exception.

#2: D’s objection to rewards for good deeds and punishment for bad **violates the
principle of justice** which is that human beings should get the appropriate

consequences for their actions. Why should people not receive an appropriate consequence for their action? In fact, to deny them their appropriate consequence is unjust.

#3: in effect D. advocates deontological ethics, i.e. ethics in which an action is done for its own sake and not for its consequences or for consequences for the doer. Deontological ethics are highly problematic: for example, if lying is always wrong regardless of consequences, then we would not be able to lie to a Nazi search party seeking a Jew we are hiding. The **Baha'i Writings** reject this, stating that a doctor may lie to help a patient recover (SAQ 215 – 216).

* Deontological ethics have no clear way of resolving conflicts between several moral duties, e.g. save life and tell the truth. Also: who decides which moral duties have priority and why? Also: they are poor at dealing with gray areas in which all choices entail some negative consequences because of conflicting interests, issues, duties, needs, preferences etc. Another critique is that deontological ethics are consequentialist ethics in disguise because what deontological ethics advocates are those actions which turn out to have positive consequences.

** Deontological ethics in their contractarian form is simply a form of contractualism in which people agree that certain actions are right or wrong, i.e. a social contract – but this fails because there is no intrinsic guarantee that an action is truly right – and hides the fact that an action is 'bad' because it has the consequence of violating the contract and thus hurting the group. (Disguised consequentialism) Only

divine command deontology is consistent: an action is bad because the creator of the universe says it is. All other forms of deontological ethics (rights theory, duty theory) are disguised consequentialism.

***Thus we can see that D is **ARGUING BY HALF-TRUTHS OR OMISSIONS** in not informing readers of the full nature of the position is advocating. This violates the principle eliciting informed consent from one's readers. (cf p.326 for D to wax lyrical about "informed choice.")

10) **PROGRESSIVE REVELATION**: like the other new atheists, D lacks a concept of progressive revelation and many of his historical critiques of religion are based on the inability to distinguish the "eternal; verities" of religion from the outward historical forms.

This inability mirrors a similar inability among religions themselves to make this vital distinction and, thereby, leave behind outmoded forms and rules and to accept new Manifestations.

THE END OF FAITH - HARRIS

“Our enemy is nothing other than faith itself.” (131)

1) “Our technological advances in the art of war have finally rendered our religious differences – and hence our religious *beliefs* – antithetical to our survival.” (14; original emphasis)

1.1) This is consistent with the Baha’i Writings, indeed, reflects the Baha’i teaching about the need for religious unity as necessary for peace.

2) “One of the central themes of this book however is that religious moderates are themselves the bearers of a terrible dogma: they imagine that the path to peace will be paved once each of us has learned to respect the unjustified beliefs of others. I hope to show that *the very ideal of religious tolerance – born of the notion that every human being should be free to believe whatever he wants about God – is one of the principal forces driving us towards the abyss.*” (15)

2.1) **THE NEW INTOLERANCE**: this is one of the distinguishing features of the new atheists, their (Dawkins, Hitchens, and though more muted, Dennett) intolerance of religion and religious tolerance. They seek to justify a new intolerance – and this leads to a **SELF-CONTRADICTION**: they criticize religion for its intolerance – in the name of their own intolerance! Why one intolerance should be better than another is not made clear.

2.2) “It is time we recognised that belief is not a private matter . . . for every belief is a fount of action *in potentia*.” (44; original emphasis; also 52). This is a **SELF-UNDERMINING STATEMENT**: H’s own belief is a “fount to action *in potentia*” – and therefore forms the basis for a new atheistic repression of religion, i.e. a foundation for the **NEW INTOLERANCE** or even a **NEW**

REPRESSION.

In H’s work, the dark side of the militant new atheism starts to show through. Later H adds, “We have simply lost the right to our myths, and to our mythic identities”(48).

*We no longer have the right to believe as we choose because beliefs may lead to action, according to H. By failing to distinguish between belief and action, (belief is private; action is public and subject to different rules) H sets the foundation for **a new inquisition** to suppress views he finds dangerous.

**Thus, the new atheism rests on flawed, self-contradictory foundations.

*** The new atheism thus becomes a mirror image of what it opposes, and this is seen in its unsophisticated, literalist reading of holy texts. Here

too, it becomes a mirror-image of the unimaginative narrow-mindedness which it opposes in others.

into *****"The man who fights too long against dragons becomes a dragon himself... If you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also you." Nietzsche.

2.3) Moderate religion "offers no bulwark against religious extremism and religious violence." (20)

#1: **UNTENABLE**: Every religious moderate makes himself a bulwark against violence; in so doing, s/he makes a contribution to reducing religiously-based violence. H is trying to shift responsibility for religious extremism to religious moderates.

#2: **UNTENABLE**: a religious moderate is "nothing more than a failed fundamentalist" (20).

ways of # 2.1: Here we observe the new atheists' assumption that fundamentalism is the standard by which to measure all religion. But they provide no reasons why this should be so i.e. it is an **UNSUPPORTED ASSERTION**. What makes moderate readings "failed" readings of Scripture? What about other than literalist reading scripture? All this is simply dismissed out of hand.

#2.3: In this way the new atheists' view of scripture is one extended **MISREPRESENTATION** or **BIASED SAMPLE** and their case consequently degenerates into a **STRAW MAN ARGUMENT**, or **OVERSIMPLIFICATION**.

#3) "Religious faith represents so uncompromising a misuse of the power of our minds that it forms a kind of perverse, cultural singularity – a vanishing point beyond which rational discourse proves impossible" (25).

religion #3.1: H posits an inherent contradiction between rationality and faith, - something he does not prove: **UNSUPPORTED ASSERTION**. The work of Avicenna, Aquinas, Scotus and others down to our time such as Tillich provides evidence that such is not necessarily the case. It only seems to be truer because H and the new atheists identify all with fundamentalist literalism.

*Not only do the new atheists show their ignorance of the history of philosophy and theology, but they also show no hint of the complexity of the issues they are raising. In this sense, they **MISREPRESENT** and **MISLEAD** readers.

*For example, they do not note that fideism (i.e. exclusive reliance on faith and ignoring reason) was long rejected by Catholicism, that the Baha'i Faith actively encourages reasonable investigation into religious truths, that rationalism plays a large part in Buddhist philosophy.

4) “the most monstrous crimes against humanity have invariably been inspired by unjustified belief. This is nearly a truism . . . Consider the millions of people killed by Stalin and Mao: though these tyrants paid lip service to rationality, communism was little more than a political religion.” (79)

4.1: **NO TRUE SCOTSMAN [ATHEIST] FALLACY**: H claims that Stalin and Mao who not only admitted their atheism but dedicated their lives to an ideology in which atheism played a pivotal role were not true atheists and rationalists (“paid lip service”). H simply cannot accept that in its short history, atheist Communism has consistently behaved as badly as religion at its worst.

4.2: H tries to redefine Communism as a “political *religion*” – but this can only be done by ignoring Communism’s denial of God, the supernatural, the non-material, e.g. spirit in any form, prophets and/or Manifestations. IOW, this claim is a **FALSE ANALOGY**.

4.3: **UNSUPPORTED ASSERTION**: what evidence that the worst crimes have “invariably been inspired by unjustified belief”? What about the Ukrainian Famine (1935-1936), or other crimes based on economic considerations? What about the many struggles for land (e.g. U.S.) or empire or political hegemony?

*This leads to a **SELF-CONTRADICTION**: that we should apply “the same evidentiary demands in religious matters that we make in all others.”

(35). H himself here – and elsewhere – does not meet the “evidentiary demands” he makes of others.

5) “Science will not remain mute on spiritual and ethical questions for long.” (43). This makes no sense scientifically speaking: how can we design a scientific, i.e. naturalist experiment to show that a certain action is moral or immoral? What are the scientific, i.e. naturalist attributes of a moral, immoral action? How can we design a scientific, naturalist experiment to about the supernatural, i.e. spiritual? This is blatant **CATEGORY MISTAKE** and **SELF-CONTRADICTION**.

6) “nor must we renounce all forms of spirituality or mysticism to be on good terms with reason.” (43).

#6.1: The Baha'i Writings could agree with this except that by “reason”, H means naturalist reason, i.e. reason limited by the constraints of naturalism and empiricist or positivist philosophy. H does not make this important limitation

clear to readers. H shows his naturalist bias when he says faith is when “credulity achieves escape velocity from the constraints of *terrestrial* discourse” (65; emphasis added) i.e. discourse limited by physical nature. (cf Popper, 66)

7) “It is therefore the very nature of faith to serve as an impediment to further inquiry” (45-46). H glosses over the important issue of (a) the scope of rational inquiry, or the limits of reason; (b) the relationship between faith and reason in light of the limits of reason. What H interprets as “an impediment to further inquiry” may, in some cases, simply be the inability of reason, especially empirically based reason to explore certain aspects of ontology or human existence. IOW, H’s argument is a **STRAW MAN** or an **OVERSIMPLIFICATION**.

8) “[The] spirit of mutual inquiry is the very antithesis of religious faith.” (48)

#8.1: **UNSUPPORTED ASSERTION** and **OVERGENERALIZATION** (that oversimplifies the issue.) H does not explain why this must necessarily be so, i.e. this assertion lacks a rational foundation. For example, he omits any consideration of the tradition of “faith seeking understanding” (St Anselm) in Catholicism, and the practice of consultation in the **Baha’i Faith**.

9) “faith is simply unjustified faith in matters of ultimate concern.” (65).

#9.1: **SELF-CONTRADICTION**: by “unjustified” H means ‘unjustified by science’ (75-76) i.e. naturalist, positivist, materialist science. The problem is that the view that all phenomena can be explained by science is in itself inexplicable in terms of science.

#9.2: **UNSUPPORTED ASSERTION**: Nor is there any evidence that all matters of “ultimate concern” are explicable scientifically, even if only in principle. What scientific experiment could answer the question, “Why was I born?” or “What is the meaning of my life?” or “Why is there something rather than nothing?”

10) “while religious people are not generally mad, their core beliefs are . . . most religions have just canonized a few products of ancient ignorance and derangement . . .”(66)

#10.1: **SELF-CONTRADICTION**: If as H claims that beliefs are action “*in potentia*” and are the “founts” of action, how can people hold insane beliefs and not be insane, esp. in their actions? As H tries to explain this, his dependence on the simplest literalism in reading scripture is evident.

#10.2: Re ‘canonizing’ “ancient ignorance”: **UNSUPPORTED ASSERTION**: H presents no evidence from the history of religion and theology to support this astounding claim. **GENETIC FALLACY**: H tries to discredit religious thought and philosophy by its origins.

#10.3:

11) “Every experience that a human being can have admits of rational discussion about its causes and consequences (or about our ignorance thereof.) . . . *our credulity must scale with the evidence*” (165; original emphasis)

#11.1: **FALLACY OF CONFLATION**: H confuses (a) “rational discussion” with (b) adequate explanation or necessary and sufficient explanation. Because we can do (a) does not mean we have (b) – and (b) is the crucial issue.

#11.2: By “evidence” H means ‘naturalistic evidence’, and this – as seen before – assumes that naturalistic evidence is adequate to explain all experience. Yet this is precisely what needs to be proven.

12) “A rational approach to ethics becomes possible once we realise that questions of right and wrong are really questions about the happiness and suffering of sentient beings.” (170 – 171) This is a utilitarian definition of ethics, and is only missing Bentham’s ‘hedonistic calculus’ to calculate pleasure and pain.

#12.1: **OVERSIMPLIFICATION**: This is an ambiguous statement, i.e. it raises more questions than it answers or than H answers in subsequent discussion, e.g. what is meant by “happiness”? Happiness in an Aristotelian sense of self-actualization? Happiness in the Christian sense of attaining salvation through Christ? Happiness in the Buddhist sense of decreased desire? H’s discussion isn’t adequate to the variety and complexity of views relating to this subject.

#12.2: **NATURALISTIC FALLACY**: (cf Moore): H tries to define what is good in terms of natural properties, e.g. pleasurable, painful but this starts an infinite regress: If act X is good because it brings happiness, then why is happiness good? Etc.

13) “Any one who does not harbour some rudimentary sense that cruelty is wrong is unlikely to learn that it is by reading . . . The fact that our ethical intuitions have their roots in biology reveals that our efforts to ground ethics in religious conceptions of “moral duty” are misguided.” (172)

#13.1: **UNSUPPORTED ASSUMPTION**: H raises the issue of an innate moral sense i.e. moral intuition – which is itself a major bone of contention. Does it exist? And why, if it is innate, is it so easy for people to over-ride it as he has shown in his book? Obviously this moral intuition, genetically based or not, is not sufficient to elicit moral behavior. That is why religion or Manifestations might exist – to activate, shape, and strengthen this alleged innate intuition.

#13.2: H assumes religion is not necessary since we have an innate “moral Intuition.” **NON SEQUITUR**: Religion may be necessary to activate, shape

and strengthen this alleged innate intuition, i.e. the two may work together.

#13.3: There is also more than “reading” to religious moral education. This is blatant **MISREPRESENTATION**.

14) H claims there is no necessary opposition between reason and intuition: “the traditional opposition between reason and intuition is a false one.” (183)

#14.1: **The Baha’i Writings agree** with this: intuition is not necessarily unreasonable. However, for H to suddenly take this position is a clear case of **SPECIAL PLEADING**: why are religious intuitions irrational and dangerous in H’s view, when his moral intuitions are not? He gives no reasons to support his exception.

#14.2: **The Baha’i Writings also agree** with H in regards to ethical realism and the rejection of ethical relativism (183 – 187). However, the Baha’i teaching of progressive revelation allows us to understand that the expression of these common ethical goals may vary in different historical times and circumstances. There is no need to condemn past cultures as H does.

15) Later H says, “Mysticism is a rational enterprise. Religion is not. The mystic has recognised something about the nature of consciousness prior to thought, and this recognition is susceptible to rational discussion. The mystic has reasons for what he believes and these reasons are empirical. The roiling mystery of the world can be analyzed with concepts (this is science) or it can be experienced free of concepts (this is mysticism)” (221).

#15.1: **SELF-CONTRADICTION**: if mysticism is consciousness “prior to thought” it cannot be “susceptible to “rational discussion” which is entirely dependent on conceptual thought. This problem is one of the reasons many mystics resort to metaphor, poetry, story, myth in an effort to convey in words that which is beyond conceptual thinking. If we can experience the “roiling mystery” of the world “free of concepts,” we cannot explain this experience conceptually.

*The “roiling mystery of the world” is (from H’s point of view) simple non-scientific nonsense and is **SELF-UNDERMINING**: Given H’s adherence to empirical science, what could this phrase mean?

The mystic’s “reasons for what he believes” lead to another serious **SELF-CONTRADICTION. H has previously condemned subjectivity and subjective experience as a valid source of knowledge because only scientific knowledge is objective. Yet the mystic has nothing more than his subjective experience which is inexpressible in subjective discourse. There is no scientific, objective way to assess the mystic’s experience. Given H’s earlier statements, what reasons are there to accept his

SPECIAL PLEADING on behalf of some mystics?

#15.2: “Religion is nothing more than bad concepts held in place of good ones” (221).

***REDUCTIONIST FALLACY**: i.e. the attempt to reduce a complex phenomena to one of their component parts or aspects. Baha’is can grant that religion has some out-moded concepts but this does not prove that religion per se is made up only of such concepts.

16) “At the core of every religion lies an undeniable claim about the human condition: it is possible to have one’s experience of the world radically transformed. . . The problem with religion is that it blends this truth so thoroughly with the venom of unreason.” (204).

#15.1: In explaining this, H’s **literal reading** of scripture emerges again. This hampers rational de-mythologizing of texts and rational interpretation.

#15.2: H’s understanding of scripture is hampered by his lack of the concept of **progressive revelation**. This lack hampers all of the new atheists’ work.

16) H’s advocacy of mysticism at the end of the book is simply a vast **SELF-CONTRADICTION** even though he claims “mysticism is a rational enterprise. Religion is not . . . The mystic has reasons for what he believes and these reasons are empirical.” (221).

17) The contest between religions is zero sum . . . because our religions are intrinsically hostile to one another” (225).

17.1: **Baha’is agree** with this – and recognize it as an artefact of our evolutionary and historical development that needs to be overcome. The Baha’i teachings of the essential unity of religions and progressive revelation are intended to solve this problem.

*Baha’is cannot agree with H’s claim that there is no room in any faiths for “religious toleration and religious diversity.” (225). This is simply an **OVER GENERALIZATION** based on ignorance.

&&&&&&

10) Perhaps H’s most famous claim is that religion is child abuse: i.e. the lies, sexual mutilation and other sexual prohibitions. Among other things he writes, “If religious instruction *were not allowed* until the child had attained the age of reason, we would be living in a quite different world” (220; italics added)

10.1) By a “quite different world” H means a better one. This is an **UNSUPPORTED ASSERTION**. What proof is there?

#1: The history of programmatically atheist regimes shows no sign of this at all. Communist Russia, China, N. Korea, Cambodia, Romania, Albania, etc. have shown conclusively that atheism does not promote a superior morality or ‘breed’ better people.

#2: Once in his book, H. admits that “It is certainly true that emancipation From religion does not always produce the best mammal either.” (250).

#3: He gives the individual example of J D Bernal – but this is clearly a case of a **MISREPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE**: see the massive depredations of programmatically atheist regimes in the Communist world.

It does not properly represent the massive and systemic horrors of atheistic Communism.

10.2) **SELF-CONTRADICTION**: H is opposed to totalitarianism – but here we see his own totalitarian impulse to “improve the species” through the intervention to forbid to teach people religion before the “age of reason” (220). Who but the state could enforce such a ban on religious instruction? Why does he sanction such state inference in the private lives of the family?

10.3) H spends little time to demonstrate that teaching religion is child abuse and a lot of time dealing with specific issues, abortion, circumcision, etc. But this is all **BESIDE THE POINT** – these discussions do not prove why religious instruction per se is child abuse. It only shows that child abuse – or what we consider such – may be perpetrated by religious people or in a religious context. Abuse has nothing to do with instruction.

1: This is another case of **GUILT BY ASSOCIATION** and an **APPEAL TO EMOTIONS/PITY**.

10.4) “Nothing proves the man-made character of religion as obviously as the sick mind that designed hell . . .” (219)

#1: **NON SEQUITUR**: in what way do descriptions of the punishments of hell prove that religion is man-made? How are the two issues connected? Could it not be that God designed them? Or that they are metaphors not to be taken literally?

(11) H tries to invoke Kant’s categorical imperative as evidence that we do not need

Religion as a basis for values. “Human decency is not derived from religion. It precedes it” (266).

1: The problem with the categorical imperative (CI) is that it is an empty claim: it gives no specific guidance: a psychopath might very well agree that all people act as he does; Hitler, Stalin, Mao etc. expected them to – and struck first. In fact, The CI prohibits and encourages nothing but our own subjective tastes as a standard for morals.

#2: H also makes use of Hume who, who, in H’s view, “suggested that a profession of belief in a perfectly simple, and omnipresent supreme being was in fact a covert profession of atheism because such a being could possess nothing that we could reasonably call a mind or will.” (267)

*That may be true on Hume’s premises but Hume’s unproven and unprovable naturalistic premises make his conclusion not *necessarily* true.

** **NON SEQUITUR**: H’s argument is this: Because I can disprove the existence of your God, then you cannot believe in Him and must be an atheist – even though you still believe in Him! This makes no sense.

#3:

12) **ERRORS OF FACT**:

#1: Kant’s proof against any theistic arguments (265): H misunderstands Kant antinomies – they make both theistic and atheistic arguments untenable according to Kant. They leave the situation between theists and atheists at a draw, though in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he showed why belief in God is necessary for .morals.

H invokes Epicurus re God’s willingness and ability to control evil. Whatever the merits or demerits of this argument, it is **BESIDE THE POINT** vis-à-vis God’s existence.

13) “The connection between religion, racism and totalitarianism is also to be found in the other most hateful dictatorship of the twentieth century: the vile system of apartheid in South Africa.” (251).

#1: **AMPHIBOLY**: this statement can be read in two ways – stating either that religion, i.e. Dutch Reformed Church supported apartheid or that there is an intrinsic connection between religion per se and apartheid and its oppression.

*The first is demonstrably true – and the second is demonstrably false.
 Many churches and other religions opposed and/or undermined
 apartheid
 in various ways.

**There is no necessary connection between religion and apartheid or
 racism. Such connections are inevitably man-made extrinsic additions.

70: **Error of fact:** Hitchens – like many – completely misinterprets Tertullian’s statement “I believe it because it is absurd” – because he does not know its original context. In the original he says that the apostles were reasonable men would not have believed the resurrection if they had not seen it, and therefore, on that basis he can believe it even though it is absurd. Otherwise, this quote would be an assertion of fideism which the Church had rejected.

#1: H shows no sign of exposure to the logical rigors of medieval philosophy; otherwise he would not make such sweeping statements about religion’s enmity to reason.