

Science and Religion at the Crossroads: Conflict or Conciliation?

Abdul. B. SHAIKH

*University of Leeds, 12 Carrside Crescent Batley
West Yorkshire WF17 7JN
01924 509444
Email: A.B.Shaikh@leeds.ac.uk*

Abstract

Science and religion today evoke feelings ranging from suspicion, distrust, conflict to those of respect, tolerance and indeed conciliation. This paper aims to explore the ongoing debate centring upon whether the forces of science and religion can ever be reconciled. In our discussion, we shall explore the contributions made by two of the most celebrated personalities of our generation the theologian Alister McGrath and the evolutionary scientist Richard Dawkins.

Keywords: religion, science, conflict, God.

1. The Foundations of Dialogue

The events of September 11 touched the hearts and minds of people across the entire globe. At the time, many commentators claimed that the event marked the onset of the clash of civilisations where the forces of Islamic fundamentalism would be in perpetual conflict with the West. One may recall that Samuel Huntington (1927-2008) was indeed the pioneer of this theory that was expressed in his book *'The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order'* (1993, 1996). More significantly, these harrowing events reawakened the old age stereotypes of Muslims and Islam in general that had been formulated by the Crusades and now led to a situation where hostility and general suspicion existed between people of the Abrahamic faiths and those of a non-religious persuasion. In the days, months and years since 9/11, many have unfortunately witnessed this hostility and suspicion increase and tensions have been further exacerbated by conflict and violence. Unfortunately, conflict, suspicion and outright hatred have become the norm which has undermined

genuine attempts made in some quarters to encourage and foster mutual understanding and utmost respect between the faiths and those of a non-religious persuasion. Therefore, we will argue that even though the events of 9/11 reawakened age-old stereotypes of conflict and distrust amongst humanity, humankind and the adherents of major faiths of the world have a duty to come together in order to lay to rest the hatred, suspicion and mutual distrust and open a new era of open dialogue and mutual understanding.

In recent times, we have been bombarded with conflicting messages centring upon the view that science and religion are engaged in a momentous battle to establish the ultimate truth. This battle is best described as being one that pits those who have faith in a supernatural entity with the agents of rationalism who declare their allegiance to evidence based thinking and the natural sciences. Alister McGrath (1953-) has provided fresh impetus to this important debate by declaring that the main obstacle that prevents permanent reconciliation between science and religion is the prevalence of warfare mentality. One may ask what is meant by warfare mentality and its significance in this debate. McGrath describes warfare mentality as involving religionists and scientists/naturalists alike engaged in refuting arguments in essence concerning the possibility or impossibility of the existence of the divine coupled with the development of our universe. The conflict or warfare mentality in recent years has become ever more complex and intense characterised by concrete markers that in effect have created dividing lines between the two opposing camps. McGrath finds this state of affairs highly surprising, especially when there are approximately forty per cent of natural scientists subscribing to a particular form or system of belief. Unfortunately, the dividing lines have been further exacerbated by the nominal perception that natural sciences are diametrically opposed to all forms of religion.¹

McGrath makes an interesting case above because ever since the influence of religion has declined in mainstream

¹ McGrath, Alister .E. *The Foundations of Dialogue in Science and Religion*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1998, 20.

societies across the world, we find that atheism and theism have been engaged in a vicious yet unpleasant battle. At present, creationist movements such as the BAV in Turkey and the Creationist Science Movement in America have had several engagements with naturalist scientists with each party trying to disprove or prove creation and evolution with mixed results. McGrath is right in arguing that warfare mentality has led to polarisation and a hardening of positions in recent years and very little progress has been made to achieve a moratorium of understanding so much so that members on both sides prefer to savage one another's arguments for public relations purposes. Both parties have failed to deliver a decisive blow contrary to claims that this has been achieved. The existence of God and development of the universe cannot be demonstratively proven and a theist accepts the above as a matter of faith. The atheist uses the vehicle of natural science to show that the existence of God is more than likely improbable and that natural selection provides a better explanation of the development of the universe as opposed to scripture.

The warfare mentality or conflict approach has largely been fuelled by dignitaries on opposing sides of the divide who have been engaged in shoring up their defences without ever giving much consideration to reconciliation or finding common ground. The most notable dignitary amongst the naturalist camp who has fuelled this debate is none other than the zoologist Richard Dawkins (1941-). Dawkins it has to be said is no friend of religion due to his undying love for evidence based thinking. Dawkins underlying allegiance to evidence based thinking has encouraged him to vehemently attack the concept of religious faith as well as all forms of organised belief. McGrath also expresses his disappointment with co-religionists approach to this complex debate and in turn accuses them of using a similar approach akin to those of their adversaries. It should be noted that McGrath accuses a number of Christian groups of adopting what can be described at best

as an anti-scientific stance based on the premise that science is somehow irreconcilable with the literalism of the Bible.²

Dawkins and his contemporaries have mounted a concerted attack on religion primarily due to science and not faith being the yardstick of truth. Dawkins would only be convinced that God actually exists if this could be demonstratively proven or that science pointed in this direction. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that Dawkins dispels the notion of God and creation and relegates it to nothing more than superstition because he is ardent self avowed supporter of evidence based thinking. However, one is rather alarmed with Dawkins' sole reliance on biology and natural sciences in arguing that God does not exist and that creation is nothing more than superstition. There is no reference to cosmology or indeed physics in his argument, which incidentally provide numerous and one might add excellent examples that point towards the existence of a creator.

McGrath should be commended for his whole hearted appeals centring upon the need for engagement leading to potential reconciliation because conflict creates more problems than solutions. However, one does not share McGrath's argument that both parties can come together in order to achieve conciliation based on the fact that the two camps are too polarised with entrenched positions that prevent progress. Therefore, one cannot foresee a situation that would involve a religious individual literally accepting the creation story warming to the ideas provided by Darwinian natural selection. Likewise, a proponent of Darwinian evolution who rejects the notion of God is hardly likely to embrace the idea of creation after a few debates. Therefore based on the above view, conciliation is an unlikely prospect and it is better for both sides to interpret nature in an atheistic or theistic way and accept that both sides will disagree with another without resorting to hostility. The order of the day should be mutual understanding and healthy respect for one another with the acceptance that both sides of the divide agree to disagree.

² Ibid,21.

2. Approaches towards Conflict Resolution

The credibility of the so called warfare approach has been undermined by modern scholarship which has gone some way to arresting the deteriorating relationship between science and religion. However, one should remember that the ensuing conflict between the opposing forces have created deep schisms amongst many in the scientific community. The outbreak of hostilities between the two camps seems to have overshadowed sincere attempts to gain a genuine understanding regarding natural phenomena so much so that the modern age has seen the rise of a well-perpetuated myth which declares that science has conquered all before it. The reader should be aware that the perpetuation of this myth has led many to argue that religion has been relegated the status of folklore and that the concept of the deity is nothing but superstitious nonsense unworthy of debate. McGrath notes that the continuation of hostilities has created a situation where scientists of a religious persuasion find themselves in no man's land. Secondly, those scientists who profess their allegiances to a particular religious denomination have seen their voices somewhat drowned out by the ensuing chaos created by the faith and non-faith agents of warfare mentality. It should be noted that it is only these scientists who can realistically engage in fruitful debate with their peers, contemporaries and adversaries alike with the aim of eliminating the conflict mentality that has engulfed all those on both sides of the spectrum.³

So far, we have seen in quite some detail the size of the task that scientists and those of religious persuasion face when addressing the conflict between the two rival camps. This now brings us onto the discussion centring on how one should tackle the ensuing conflict with the aim of bringing about a cessation of hostilities. McGrath proposes that dialogue should be the main vehicle in order to bring about a radical transformation and a halt to the conflict/warfare approach

³ McGrath, A.E. *The Foundations of Dialogue in Science and Religion*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1998, 28.

that currently dominates the scene. The absence of dialogue coupled with the lack of understanding of faith related issues and the natural sciences have largely fuelled conflict that has in turn raged over the past few centuries. The merits of the arguments proposed by both sides have never been afforded the scrutiny they deserve and have been duly rejected thus leading to the situation we have today. Western academia has been warned that failure to forge a mutual understanding or engage in constructive dialogue will further lead to polarisation. Polarisation and an apparent hardening of positions over the debate will inevitably lead to a situation where rapprochement will become an ever distant proposition.⁴

3. The Relationship between God, Science and Religion

3.1. The Concept of God: Myth or Reality

Post modernity has witnessed an explosion in anti-religious sentiment that has been further exacerbated by the outpouring of atheistic sympathies. Richard Dawkins, a zoologist by profession it can be said has been the most prominent critic of religion and has vigorously argued that the question of the existence or non-existence of God form part of a hypothesis that be subjected to intellectual reason.⁵ McGrath admits that Dawkins successfully exposed William Paley's (1743-1805) work *Natural Theology* in his treatise '*The Blind Watchmaker*' on purely biological grounds due to his expertise in this field. However, despite Dawkins *accomplishments* with regards to the refutation of Paley's work, it is important to note that Paley's views were typical of that era and in no way reflected Christian theological ethos. McGrath makes this interesting point and goes onto argue that this view is further reinforced by the testimonies of Paley's contemporaries who

⁴ McGrath, A.E. *The Foundations of Dialogue in Science and Religion*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1998, 28.

⁵ McGrath, A.E. *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2007, 6.

were concerned that this type of approach would lead to the triumph of atheism over theology.⁶

Dawkins assault on religion and the question of the existence of God predominantly feature in his work called *The God Delusion* (2006).⁷ McGrath attacks Dawkins for solely concentrating and attacking the key notions that form part of the philosophy of religion.⁸ Dawkins has failed to make a genuine case against religion primarily on the grounds that he has not acquired little experience or knowledge of world religions. McGrath goes onto argue that one can only successfully attack the fundamentals of religion once the latter has been fully understood and undergone further analysis and scrutiny. One of the main charges levelled by Dawkins against the philosophy of religion is seen in the form of religious thinkers and philosophers provide many interesting discussions that derive inconclusive results thus failing to prove the existence of God. McGrath argues that Dawkins comments concerning Aquinas' understanding of God are wholly misconstrued primarily on the grounds that the latter is not making arguments for existence of God but rather is expressing his belief in a deity. Furthermore, it should be noted that Aquinas acceptance of the view that God created the world was derived from his faith and therefore came to this conclusion after accepting that the order that is manifest in the universe points towards the very existence of a supernatural entity. Some Christians today hold the view that faith in God provides a satisfying answer that explains the very nature and purpose of the universe. One should remember that Aquinas did not speak of creation as being proof of God's existence but reflects his deep faith and conviction in God. The manifestation of design in the universe offers persuasion and does not

⁶ Ibid, 7.

⁷ Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*, Bantam Books, Great Britain, 2006, 77-78.

⁸ McGrath, A.E. *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2007, 7.

provide certain proof that point towards the existence of God.⁹
10

McGrath is quite within his rights to question Dawkins knowledge of the Christian faith based on the fact that it is imperative for a individual to master the basics of the opponents arguments and at the same time develop an appreciation for the subject prior to launching a full blown attack on one's opponent. Aquinas never talked of creation being proof of God's existence, but it reflected his deep faith and for him offered a better explanation of the development of the universe in comparison to other ideas. Dawkins is quite wrong to level a charge against the philosophers that they fail to prove the existence of God when in fact he fails to disprove God's existence. Dawkins latest book '*The God Delusion*' provides pages and pages of endless speculation that God does not exist without any demonstrative proof. Dawkins abject failure to disprove the existence of God is best summed when a section in his book states why there almost certainly is no God. It makes us wonder why Dawkins invested so much time in his book when in fact he would have been better served studying his opponents' arguments more carefully and concentrated more energy into providing proofs that rules out the existence of God. Just because God is not visible to the naked eye it does not necessarily mean he does not exist. It is fairly obvious that the rationalists will not accept the above view, as natural demonstration is the common denominator for their line of enquiry.

3.2. Has Science Disproved the Existence of God?

Dawkins more recently has declared that science has eliminated the arguments concerning the question surrounding the existence of God. This rather spectacular claim has been supported by Dawkins and his contemporaries based on their rejection of belief in superstition which is

⁹ Dawkins, R. *The God Delusion*, Bantam Books, Great Britain, 2006, 77-79.

¹⁰McGrath, A.E. *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2007, 7-8.

broadly translated as religion or faith. The house of science has therefore in the 21st century triumphed over the vestiges of faith leaving atheism to bask in its crowning glory never to be challenged again. Dawkins goes further and now argues that atheism in the modern age is the sole progressive ideology that can quench the thirst of the free thinking individual.^{11 12}

The Dawkinsian analysis that natural scientific proof has eliminated the idea of God is rather a brash statement. It is strikingly obvious to see how Dawkins comes to this conclusion because his argument has been devised through restricted mediums of science namely biology and zoology. If one looks at his arguments in his numerous works, one will find that he disregards contributions made by physics and cosmology in his debates or resorts to making fleeting references to the above to show that he is not biased. Obviously, natural science does show a pattern of development but does that necessarily mean that God does not exist? It should be understood that from a demonstrative viewpoint that it is conceivable to interpret nature from a theistic and atheistic viewpoint but the difference arises in terms of whether an individual has faith or not in a God. What Dawkins is forgetting is that to form a well rounded and balanced argument when attempting to dismiss the idea of God's existence arguments for and against using examples from all the branches of scientific enquiry have to be taken into consideration. It is unfortunate that Dawkins talks in the same vein as those who he attacks namely the religious fundamentalists but with a slight difference in that atheist fundamentalism is at the heart of his ethos.

It is at this juncture that McGrath takes exception to Dawkins sweeping statements declaring the end of religion or superstition and the triumph of atheism. Stephen Jay Gould

¹¹ Dawkins, R. *The God Delusion*, Bantam Books, Great Britain, 2006, 57.

¹² McGrath, A.E. *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2007, 13.

(1941-2002), a well known evolutionist claimed in his book *Rocks of Ages* that approximately half of his colleagues are ignorant or that Darwinism is compatible with religious beliefs and atheism at the same time. Dawkins response to Gould's comments is one of shock horror compounded by the prospect of an avowed atheist making such remarks that provide ammunition to the opposing side. In order to repair the damage caused by Gould, Dawkins attempts to bring closure to the debate by stating that it is highly unlikely that his contemporary would make such radical statements.^{13 14} For McGrath, Gould's statement is highly significant in that science is not the all conquering force Dawkins has made out to be that has somehow eliminated religious ideology. It is true to say that science is more than ever being asked to interpret new phenomena in an extremely complex universe but it is not right to argue that science is the only medium to true understanding. The defenders of rationalism have made an immense contribution towards the aim of gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the universe. It is hugely disappointing to find that a number of rationalist scientists have chosen to ignore such contributions and have advanced their own vested interests to declare that science is the only intellectual superhighway to true knowledge. It is at this point that McGrath proposes that we embrace a new methodology or criterion when making investigations which involves weighing and analysing evidence on the balance of all probabilities rather than engage in proof and disproof.¹⁵

Gould makes a valid point when he argued that it was quite conceivable to interpret nature in a theistic and atheistic manner because it comes down to personal perception and indeed conviction as to whether one accepts the existence of

¹³ Dawkins, R. *The God Delusion*, Bantam Books, Great Britain, 2006, 57.

¹⁴ McGrath, A.E. *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2007, 13.

¹⁵ McGrath, A.E. *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2007, 14.

God or not. It seems quite strange that Dawkins is arguing that Gould would never have made these remarks when in fact the evidence is present in Gould's work. Dawkins was dismayed at Gould's remarks and then claimed that the latter would never have made these claims is due to the fact that it undermines the argument of the naturalists when they dispute the existence of God. Furthermore, Dawkins it seems rebukes his contemporary based on the fact that they give ammunition to people like McGrath who argue that science and religion are not in conflict.

It seems to us that Dawkins attempts to present science as the sole medium to true knowledge is driven by his denial of God couple with a narrow interpretation of the natural world. Science on its own cannot and has not explained everything because even today scientists have insufficient knowledge about many a phenomena and are still engaged in an continual process in order to unravel hidden mysteries. If science was the true medium to higher intellectual knowledge then surely scientists would have unravelled the major secrets of the universe and found proof that God does not exist. Dawkins is entitled to his opinion but to say science is the only way to the truth is a long way from reality. Science and religion are not in conflict as one is led to believe and personal bias and subjectivity should not override true examination of the evidences that lay before us. Many people on both sides of the divide have attacked one another without delivering any concrete results leading to the continuation of warfare imagery and this has been fuelled by subjectivity and a narrow interpretation of evidence that lies before us. Therefore, one echoes McGrath's call for a new methodology to be devised in order to test the claims of the opposing sides with the aim of establishing the truth.

3.3. The Limitations of Science

Science is the sole medium through which we humans are able to understand the dynamic inner mysteries of the complex universe. More importantly, the reader should be aware of the fact that science has no limits and those unknown mysteries at this present time may be unravelled at some point

in the future. Therefore, one can say that time is the central denominator in these missions. McGrath argues the above statement is very much typical of the Dawkinsian creed. *The God Delusion* offers a strong defence of the position held by natural science and central to the creed of Dawkins and his contemporaries is the view that there is no room for God to hide and science will triumph over faith by being the vehicle of explaining the known as well the unknown. Dawkins and his contemporaries are highly confident that in time science will banish the notion of God into the history books thus leading to the coronation of atheism.¹⁶

Dawkins is being rather optimistic in his outlook that the rise of science will culminate in the demise of religion based on the fact the latter has survived many onslaughts in past years and yet survived to tell the tale. Many people throughout time have supported naturalist arguments similar to those advocated by Dawkins and disputed the notion of the existence of a creator God and yet religion was not eliminated. There will always be people until the end of time that will view nature in an atheistic or theistic manner and it is for this reason why science will not triumph over religion and vice versa. The battle for supremacy will always rage because each opposing party will use science to prove or disprove the opposing arguments instead of making a concerted attempt to establish where common ground exists.

For one moment, it may seem that the writing is on the wall for world religions and its adherents based on the view that the giant that is atheism shall consume its lesser and infinitely weaker opponent. However, McGrath and others offer a glimmer of hope and advance the argument that science is not the all-conquering force it has been trumped up to be. These actors support the argument that while science is extremely beneficial to mankind it has its limitations and cannot be the yardstick by which everything should be proven or disproven. However, those who hold such views have found themselves on the receiving end of criticism levelled by

¹⁶ McGrath, A.E. *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2007, pp.14-15.

Dawkins who is of the view that the sceptics of science are indeed anti-science. McGrath distances himself from Dawkinsian thought for a moment and points out that it is quite legitimate to question and indeed scrutinise science in order to verify its reliability and accuracy. To question the very merits of science should not be interpreted as one favouring superstition (religion) over rationalism.¹⁷ The science explains everything mentality that dominates scientific atheism should be treated with extreme caution based on the fact that scientific theories cannot necessarily explain every material phenomena of the universe but can only shed light on only things that are visible to the naked eye. Therefore, it is worthwhile to remember that there are many legitimate questions and answers by virtue of their own nature that lay outside the framework of scientific methodology. Dawkins as the defender of scientific rationalism dismisses the view that there is purpose in nature based on the premise that there is no scientific evidence that points us in that direction. McGrath takes an opposite view and supports the argument that it is perfectly legitimate to question anything in the hope that certain puzzles or mysteries can be solved.¹⁸

Science has made an immense contribution to mankind's progress and development in the last 200 years and its significance should not be underestimated. However, one objects to Dawkins' arguments when he claims that those who question science are indeed anti-science because he is guilty of the same crime he accuses his opponents off. Dawkins outlook is anti-religion in essence characterised by constant attacks that consist of refuting theological arguments without any true understanding theological doctrine and metaphysical issues more importantly without proof. McGrath is quite right to argue that science and scientific arguments should be scrutinised like everything else in order to establish its credibleness because this is the only way that allows man to

¹⁷ Ibid, 14-15.

¹⁸ McGrath, A.E. *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2007, 16-17.

arrive at the truth. It seems Dawkins rather strange attack on his opponents gives the impression that he is rather worried that the naturalist arguments disputing creation and the existence of God may actually come under intense scrutiny with the risk that they maybe unravelled in time. We have to move away from the science explains everything mentality because it cannot explain the unknown or hidden and can only be used to gain an understanding and appreciation of the existence of living things in the natural world.

3.4. Science Equates to Atheism

In certain quarters, religion has been deemed to have been consumed by a vociferous force known as science. Science it is said has fundamentally undermined faith in a god which in turn is said to have been relegated to a lower status. Furthermore, the naturalists are of the view that those who engage in religion and put their faith in a supreme being are followers of superstition. This prevalent view has caught hold amongst many in the scientific and non-scientific world so much so some have begun to accept that all scientists are atheists.¹⁹

Earlier in the section, we came across the argument put forward by Dawkins that strongly suggested that if one studies and travels through the world of the natural sciences it will lead the individual to the pinnacle of an intellectual superhighway that is atheism. Dawkins is wholly adamant that a journey through the natural sciences naturally leads one to shun religion and accept atheistic values. However, this view has been roundly criticised by McGrath who says that not all scientists have turned to atheism due to their inclinations towards natural science. Nothing could be further from the truth as many scientists have taken exception to Dawkins' views and McGrath says that some scientists chose of their own volition to portray atheist tendencies due to a profound bias against religion or through the medium of assumptions. The most surprising element of the discussion made by

¹⁹ McGrath, A.E. *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2007, 19-20.

Dawkins is the fact that many of his contemporaries have spoken out against the view that scientists can only be true scientists by adhering to atheism as well as dismissing the argument that natural science is the superhighway to atheism. McGrath cannot hide his disappointment that his contemporary Dawkins has hijacked the debate and become a self-appointed high priest of atheism claiming to speak for the whole scientific community. The attitude of Dawkins has created a situation where one man claims to speak for the whole community when in fact he does not have an overwhelming mandate to do so. McGrath counters the argument put forward by Dawkins and suggests that those scientists that possess faith or inclined towards religion do so because they interpret the natural world in a theistic manner as opposed to atheistic one. For McGrath, it is entirely plausible for an individual to view the world in both ways because nature is such a thing that it does not demand a positive explanation and the rejection of other possibilities. There are indeed some scientists out there that respect atheistic or theistic interpretations held by their contemporaries despite certain misgivings.²⁰

It is rather unfortunate that an esteemed scholar such as Dawkins has chosen to give up objectivity in favour of espousing his atheist fundamentalist credentials. However, we should not be surprised by this as he is using the natural sciences to propagate the view that God does not exist because he is absent from the process and there is no justification for his presence or divine activity. Secondly, if one looks at the natural world in isolation it is quite obvious that one will arrive at the conclusion that natural science equals atheism, but this should not be interpreted as arguing that atheism is the ultimate truth. The interpretation of the natural world in a restricted manner can only be said to represent the truth if there is overwhelming evidence to say so. The triumph of atheism will only be a reality when the existence of God is disproven and if it cannot then it cannot be deemed to be the super-intellectual highway to true knowledge that Dawkins so

²⁰ Ibid, 21-23.

fondly speaks off. Proof is required to show that the natural sciences comprehensively disprove theological arguments as narrow interpretations of nature have not refuted theological arguments for the existence of God.

4. The Problem with Religious Fundamentalists

Richard Dawkins, the self-avowed rationalist, argues in his book *The God Delusion* (2006) that he is not seeking to be or being confrontational with people of faith. Despite the book containing withering criticisms of religion ranging from the latter being none other than superstition to the likelihood that God most probably does not exist, Dawkins passionately argues that adopting a confrontational stance when seeking to establish the truth is not deemed to be the best method. Dawkins expresses his displeasure at attempts to portray him as some warmonger hell bent on picking a fight with theologians and many of his colleagues have made similar remarks. Dawkins has confronted these criticisms by claiming that his attacks on his opponents are merely words.²¹

Dawkins' own assessment of his work is a far cry from what the audience perceive to be that is a fully concerted attack on people who subscribe to faith. *The God Delusion* fails to demolish the argument that there is no God which is summed up by a chapter why there almost certainly is no God. The treatise was an attempt to convince people that God does not exist, but Dawkins fails to do justice on a number of points, such as conclusively disproving God's existence. Secondly, the book only serves to bolster the ranks of the naturalist camp without ever really refuting religious doctrine by glorifying the merits of natural science. The lack of discussion within the book concerning the weakness of religious doctrine across several faiths is surprisingly missing and not touched upon and therefore the book does not do itself or the author justice. One of the ways in which the author could have proved that scripture has erred in relation to the presence of the supernatural would have been a systematic discussion of this notion

²¹ Dawkins, R. *The God Delusion*, Bantam Books, Great Britain, 2006, 281.

and point by point refutation of the key themes that underpin the God idea. Dawkins' work contains little or no reasoned discussion of theological doctrine and it just goes to show that scientists should only attack and dispute religious doctrine once they have fully mastered the opponents' arguments. One suggests that Dawkins study religious arguments in more detail before penning a book that seems to the reader to be an incoherent rant against perfectly reasonable people who choose to accept the notion of God. There is no doubt that Dawkins would most certainly be annoyed if a religious thinker attacked the natural sciences in a book without developing a thorough understanding of the subject.

The main thrust of Dawkins' attack on religions seems to come in the form of religious fundamentalists considering themselves to be the speakers of truth based on the premise that scripture is one-hundred per cent truth and therefore the latter is the word of God. The second argument against scripture presented by Dawkins is that it is not the by-product of intellectual reasoning and this point takes on added importance when we find that scientific evidence disproves scripture that in turn sees religious fundamentalists dismiss science in favour of erroneous data. Dawkins expresses his disappointment at those religious fundamentalists who despite the truth glaring in their faces refuse to accept reliable and accurate scientific information that has been verified. The same cannot be said for scientists who are quite willing to reevaluate established data and reject it as and when new reliable and indeed accurate information comes to the fore. Furthermore, scientists are constantly revising books when errors and inconsistencies are highlighted and that the same cannot be said for religious fundamentalists who refuse to engage in such practices and continue to accept erroneous data contained in scripture.²² The natural world provides a plethora of examples that points us in the direction of natural selection and therefore distances us from the creationist ideals espoused by the religious fundamentalists. It is true to say that the arguments for natural selection and creationists

²² Ibid, 282.

arguments are rather wonderful from an observational point of view, but we cannot escape the fact that the natural world provides evidence that points towards non-creationist ideals that the creationists cannot firm grasp. Dawkins then finds a moment to engage in apologetics by declaring he is not the avowed fundamentalist-atheist that belongs to the so-called evolutionist faith and points out that he is quite willing to reconsider his position if new evidence came to light.²³

Religious fundamentalism is seen by Dawkins to be anti-science and this view is advanced by scripture conditioning the mind to adopt a religious mindset. Secondly, religious fundamentalism restricts the mind and thus creates a barrier that prevents each and every individual from accessing new scientific discoveries. Dawkins cites the example of Kurt Wise (1959-) a well known American geologist to illustrate his argument stated above. According to Dawkins, Wise was subjected to fundamentalist religious thinking in the guise of Young Earth Creationism (YEC) and realised that science in the form of geology was on an inevitable collision course with the religious ideals he had grown up with and become accustomed to. Legend has it that Wise went through the Bible and cut out all the verses that contradicted scientific geological data and came to the conclusion that it was science and not scripture that brought mankind closer to the truth. However, it has to be said that despite a scripture being overwhelmingly contradicted by scientific data, Wise never managed to shackle the chains of literal Biblical creationism and rejected the overwhelming truth provided by the natural world. It is at this point that Dawkins expresses his dismay at Wise's rejection of evidence based thinking in favour of creationist verses in the Bible²⁴.

It should be said that science and religion have more in common than they are given credit for by commentators on each side of the divide. The conflict between science and religion has been perpetuated by one factor which is that science is the yardstick of truth for the scientist whilst faith is

²³ Dawkins, R. *The God Delusion*, Bantam Books, Great Britain, 2006, 283.

²⁴ Dawkins, R. *The God Delusion*, Bantam Books, Great Britain, 2006, 284-285.

the yardstick of the faith orientated person. The conflict between science and religion can only be solved by one medium which is that of conciliation.

Bibliography

1. DAWKINS, Richard. *The God Delusion*, Bantam Books, Great Britain, 2006.
2. MCGRATH, Alister, E. *The Dawkins Delusion: Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2007.