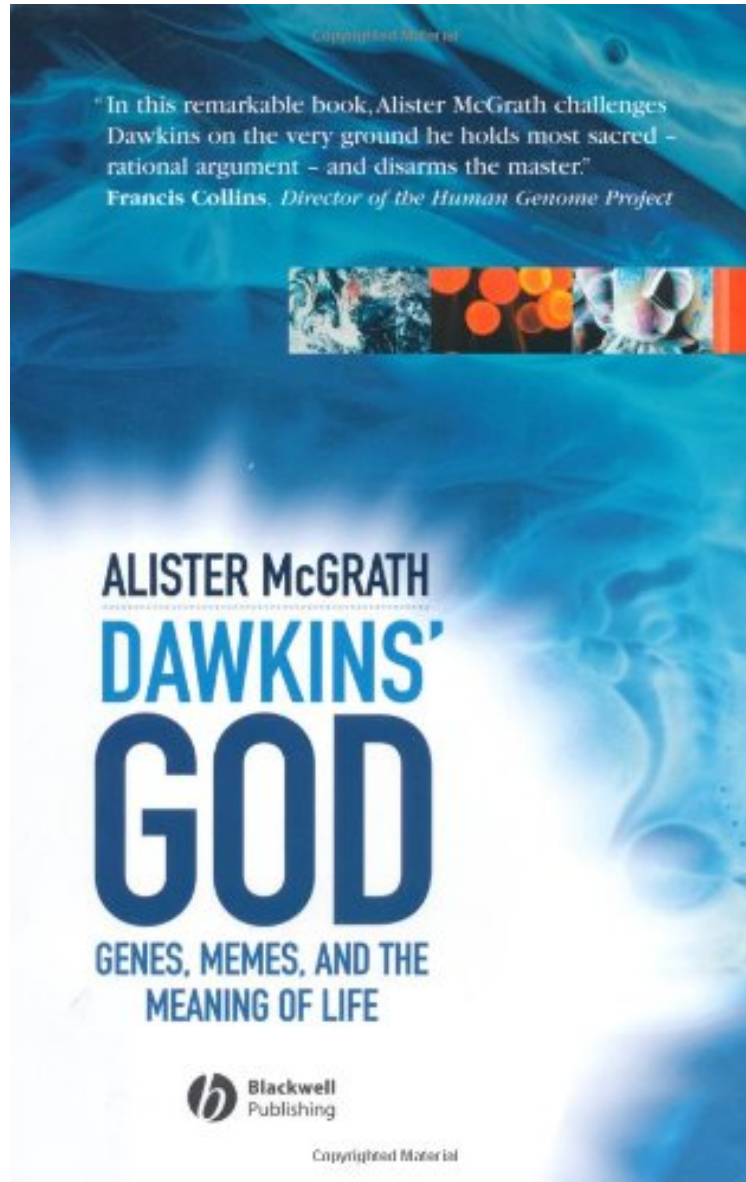


Dawkins' GOD: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life

Alister E. McGrath

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Alister E. McGrath : Dawkins' GOD: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dawkins' GOD: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. THE THEOLOGIAN/APOLOGIST CRITIQUES RICHARD DAWKINS [PRE-2005] ATHEISM By Steven H Propp Alister Edgar McGrath (born 1953) is an Irish theologian,

priest, intellectual historian, scientist, and Christian apologist, who is a professor at the University of Oxford, and is Professor of Divinity at Gresham College. He has written many other books, such as *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith*, *Surprised by Meaning: Science, Faith, and How We Make Sense of Things*, *A Cloud of Witnesses: Ten Great Christian Thinkers*, *Intellectuals Don't Need God and Other Modern Myths*, etc. He wrote in the introductory section of this 2005 book, *The real issue for me is how [Richard] Dawkins proceeds from a Darwinian theory of evolution to a confident atheistic worldview, which he preaches with messianic zeal and unassailable certainty* this book is not a critique of Dawkins evolutionary biology. I propose to engage the broader conclusions that he draws from these, particularly concerning religion and intellectual history. My concern is supremely the critically important and immensely problematic transition from BIOlogy to THEOlogy. (Pg. 10-11) He continues, *So why write such a book?... Dawkins clearly wants to provoke such a debate and discussion, and it would be churlish not to accept such an invitation* I write as a Christian theologian who believes it is essential to listen seriously and carefully to any criticism of my discipline, and respond appropriately to it. (Pg. 13) He also reveals, *In my first term at Oxford University, late in 1971, I began to discover that Christianity was rather more interesting and considerably more exciting than I had realized. While I had been severely critical of Christianity as a young man, I had never extended that same critical evaluation to atheism, tending to assume that it was self-evidently correct, and was hence exempt from being assessed in this way* My doubts about the intellectual foundations of atheism began to coalesce into a realization that atheism was actually a belief system, where I had assumed it to be a factual statement about reality By the end of November 1971, I had made my decision: I turned my back on one faith, and embraced another. (Pg. 5-6) He observes, *[Dawkins] The brilliant scientific popularizer became a savage anti-religious polemicist, preaching rather than arguing his case. I was deeply distressed at this development in someone I had admired. Dawkins account of religion tends to amount to little more than freak-pointing, with the extreme portrayed as the typical* Yet while Dawkins' atheism became more strident in its tone and more aggressive in its assertions, it did not become noticeably more sophisticated in terms of the arguments offered Dawkins writes with erudition and sophistication on issues of evolutionary biology Yet when he comes to deal with anything to do with God, we seem to enter into the world of a schoolboy debating society, relying on rather heated, enthusiastic overstatements (Pg. 8-9) He notes, *Dawkins assessment is excessively dependent on the assumption that [William] Paley (or Paleyesque) approaches to the biosphere are typical or normative for Christianity. He also seems to assume that the intellectual case for Christianity rests largely upon an argument for design* Dawkins makes a superb case for abandoning Paley. Sadly, he seems to think this also entails abandoning God. (Pg. 71) He suggests, *Dawkins presents Darwinism as an intellectual superhighway to atheism. In reality, the intellectual trajectory mapped out by Dawkins seems to get stuck in a rut of agnosticism* There is a substantial logical gap between Darwinism and atheism, which Dawkins seems to prefer to bridge by rhetoric, rather than evidence. (Pg. 80-81) He quotes Dawkins as defining faith as blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence. But McGrath comments, *So what is the evidence that anyone---let alone religious people---defines faith in this absurd way? No evidence is offered that it is representative of religious opinion* I dont accept this idea of faith, and I have yet to meet a theologian who takes it seriously It is Dawkins own definition being represented as if it were characteristic of those he wishes to criticize. (Pg. 85) He states, *Dawkins argues that, since God is complicated, he is improbable. it is quite unclear why this has any relevance it does not matter whether God is improbable improbable things happen* Anyway, why does God need to be EXPLAINED? Which of the several diverging theories of scientific explanation is Dawkins basing this assertion upon? (Pg. 93-94) He points out, given that the natural sciences proceed by inference from observational data, how can Dawkins be so sure about atheism?... It is as if atheism was the secure and inevitable result of a seamless logical argument. But how can he achieve such certainty, when the natural sciences are not deductive in their methods?... I have doubt that Dawkins is persuaded of the case for atheism. Yet the case made is nor PUBLICLY persuasive. Dawkins is obliged to make a leap of faith from agnosticism to atheism (Pg. 95-96) He criticizes Dawkins conception of a meme [i.e., a unit of cultural transmission]: *Although now a quarter of a century old, the science of memetics has failed to generate a productive research program in mainstream cognitive science, sociology, or intellectual history* Not surprisingly, Dawkins himself has moved on, distancing himself from any suggestion that he offered the meme concept as an explanation of human culture in general The memo concept was either redundant or wrong---and quite possibly both. (Pg. 134-135) This book is not likely to convince any admirers of Dawkins, but McGraths critiques make some valuable points for those who wish to critically analyze and study Dawkins atheism. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. and I thoroughly enjoy it. I can relate to him personally as ...By The Virgin Green This is the first McGrath book I've read so far, and I thoroughly enjoy it. I can relate to him personally as we have similar backgrounds, but it's not necessary in order to appreciate the book. His arguments are good and concise, and he explains things well. Although he initially says he's prepared to write a rebuttal of Dawkins on his (Dawkins') own terms - to use the same kind of rhetoric he uses - it's remarkably free of that, only bringing in an incredulous tone when it's needed. That is to say, it's not full of that sort of "This is what these people believe - isn't that just so stupid?" attitude, except, well, when it is just so stupid. And even then he explains why, unless it's obvious. I would tell anyone expecting a review of Christian theology or even McGrath's own personal beliefs to look elsewhere. And that's a good thing. McGrath points out what is wrong with

Dawkins' claims, not why someone should be offended by them personally as a Christian. He doesn't say that Dawkins is wrong because the Bible says he is. The only time he even seems to bring Christianity itself into the picture is when he is correcting a false conviction or claim about Christianity that Dawkins has made. Even now I really don't know what the particulars of McGrath's personal Christianity are - he just doesn't go into them. Overall I thoroughly enjoyed this book and look forward to reading the rest of his work. 2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Masterful Reply By Don Roy Much of Richard Dawkins' 'success' over recent years stems from his audience's lack of background in the fields that he ventures into in his effort to build a case. We are deeply indebted to people like Alister McGrath who do have the conceptual tools to penetrate Dawkins' claims and point out what is unsupportable and contradictory, e.g. the existence and function of 'memes'. Many 'armchair scientists' would do well to spend time with McGrath and be enlightened. Readers would appreciate reading this in association with one of McGrath's other productions, 'Surprised by Meaning'. It complements this work to present a clear and persuasive argument and a worthy contribution to the debate. 'It is also refreshing to see McGrath attacking the argument and not the man! Surprised by Meaning

Alister E. McGrath is one of the world's leading theologians, with a doctorate in the sciences. Richard Dawkins is one of the bestselling popular science writers, with outspoken and controversial views on religion. This fascinating and provoking work is the first book-length response to Dawkins' ideas, and offers an ideal introduction to the topical issues of science and religion. Addresses fundamental questions about Dawkins' approach to science and religion: Is the gene actually selfish? Is the blind watchmaker a suitable analogy? Are there other ways of looking at things? Tackles Dawkins' hostile and controversial views on religion, and examines the religious implications of his scientific ideas, making for a fascinating and provoking debate. Written in a very engaging and accessible style, ideal to those approaching scientific and religious issues for the first time. Alister McGrath is uniquely qualified to write this book. He is one of the world's best known and most respected theologians, with a strong research background in molecular biophysics. A superb book by one of the world's leading theologians, which will attract wide interest in the growing popular science market, similar to Susan Blackmore's *The Meme Machine* (1999).

In this book McGrath does a good job of condemning aspects of Dawkins' zealotry but in the process does much to condemn his own arguments as well. (Journal of Religious History, 20 January 2014) "The book is important for a number of reasons ... Dawkins' *God* ends with a valuable and more general chapter on science and religion, emphasising the limitations of the human mind." (The Journal of SJT, 2012) "Dawkins is disposed of with panache, and with McGrath's usual clarity and conciseness." (Theology) "Lucid and brief, without being perfunctory or dismissive, and fulfils the role of guide to the educated layperson without eliciting boredom from the academic familiar with the field ... The end result of this effort by McGrath is that, once again, I would have no hesitation in recommending the book as a basic text for A-level or first-year undergraduate students looking for their appetite to be whetted for a number of connected fields of scholarship, or indeed for the 'educated layperson' seeking a grasp of the issues without having to wade through hundreds of pages of science and theology ... A very finely judged piece of writing." (Kaleidoscope) "With clear and incisive argumentation, McGrath takes Dawkins on and exposes many of the weaknesses in his case for atheism." (Reformed Theological Journal) "In *Dawkins' God*, McGrath has written a brilliant book, and it is difficult to think that the exposition of Dawkins' writings and their religious implications, will ever be better stated, explored and criticised... at once dispassionate, robust and readable." Richard Harries, *Times Higher Education Supplement* "Alister McGrath's book *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes and the Meaning of Life* does a fair and sophisticated job of summarising my position." Richard Dawkins, *Times Higher Education Supplement* "Wielding evolutionary arguments and carefully chosen metaphors like sharp swords, Richard Dawkins has emerged over three decades as this generation's most aggressive promoter of atheism. In his view, science, and science alone, provides the only rock worth standing on. In this remarkable book, Alister McGrath challenges Dawkins on the very ground he holds most sacred - rational argument - and McGrath disarms the master. It becomes readily apparent that Dawkins has aimed his attack at a naive version of faith that most serious believers would not recognize. After reading this carefully constructed and eloquently written book, Dawkins' choice of atheism emerges as the most irrational of the available choices about God's existence." Francis Collins, Director of the Human Genome Project In this tour-de-force Alister McGrath approaches the edifice of self-confident, breezy atheism so effectively promoted by Richard Dawkins, and by deft dissection and argument reveals the shallowness, special-pleading and inconsistencies of his world-picture. Here is a book which helps to rejoin the magnificence of science to the magnificence of God's good Creation. Simon Conway Morris, Professor of Evolutionary Palaeobiology, Cambridge University This is a wonderful book. One of the world's leading Christian contributors to the science/religion dialogue takes on Richard Dawkins, Darwinism's arch-atheist, and wrestles him to the ground! This is scholarship as it should be informed, feisty, and terrific fun. I cannot wait to see Dawkins' review of Alister McGrath's critique. Michael Ruse, Lucyle T. Werkmeister Professor of Philosophy, Florida State University A timely and accessible contribution to the debate over Richard Dawkins' cosmology which exposes philosophical naivety, the abuse of metaphor, and sheer bluster, left, right and

centre. Here Alister McGrath announces what every Darwinian Fundamentalist needs to hear: that science is and always has been a cultural practice that is provisional, fallible, and socially shaped an enterprise to be cultivated and fostered, but hardly worshipped or idolised. A devastating critique. David N. Livingstone, Professor of Geography and Intellectual History, Queens University, Belfast Alister McGrath critically examines the places where Richard Dawkins well-established biological science changes into the speculations which undergird Dawkins own anti-religious faith. In his appreciative examination and ruthless analysis of Dawkins writings and the polemics associated with them, McGrath has done a marvellous apologetic job, as well as providing a particular service for those daunted by scientific authoritarianism. We are all in his debt for rigorously identifying and exposing the weaknesses of some of the commonly used arguments against the Christian faith. R. J. Berry, formerly Professor of Genetics, University College, London and President of the Linnean Society Alister McGrath subjects the atheistic world-view of Richard Dawkins to critical analysis and finds it severely lacking in intellectual rigour. As a former atheist himself, and a biochemist turned theologian and philosopher, the author is well placed to appreciate Dawkins well-deserved reputation as a populariser of evolutionary theory, but equally well qualified to assess his stratagem of using a biological theory for ideological purposes. This book is essential reading for those interested in the traffic of ideas between science, philosophy and religion. Dr Denis Alexander, Chairman, Molecular Immunology Programme, The Babraham Institute and Fellow of St. Edmunds College, Cambridge

From the Back Cover This is the first book-length response to Richard Dawkins, author of some of the most popular scientific works, such as *The Selfish Gene* and *The Blind Watchmaker*. Dawkins has become perhaps the worlds best-known atheist, noted for his hostile and controversial views on religion. This wonderfully argued book explains and examines Dawkins scientific ideas and their religious implications. Head-to-head, it takes on some of Dawkins central assumptions, like the conflict between science and religion, the selfish gene theory of evolution, the role of science in explaining the world, and brilliantly exposes their unsustainability. Moreover, this controversial debate is carried on in a style which can be enjoyed by anyone without a scientific or religious background.