
‘BELIEF IN GOD’ DOES NOT CAUSE EVIL

A RESPONSE TO RICHARD DAWKINS

Daniel Dei* and Agana-Nsiire Agana

Valley View University, P.O. Box AF 595, Adentan-Flats, Accra-Ghana

(Received 11 January 2018, revised 7 July 2018)

Abstract

Dawkins’ ‘The God Delusion’ renews an old debate concerning the existence or nonexistence of God at the instance of moral and physical/natural evil in society. He repudiates all theistic claims because theistic belief is the basis of evil in the society. He installs atheism in place of theism, claiming the former is a better alternative. Using the approach of ethical inquiry, the article responds to Dawkins’ claim that theistic belief is the basis of evil. The article studies the connection between theistic belief and reality, theism and the presence of evil, and the relevance of atheism in present-day society. The article reveals that evil is caused neither by theism nor atheism. Rather, it resides in the corrupt human nature that occurred shortly after the creation of humanity. Thus the article concludes that evil is caused and maintained by humanity’s inordinate desire for self-preservation at any cost.

Keywords: theism, atheism, morality, selfish gene, evil

1. Introduction

The overwhelming accolade received by Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion* in 2006 has reignited the debate between theism and atheism in recent times. A few months after its publication, The New York Times recorded that the book occupied the fourth position on its Hardcover Non-Fiction Best-Seller list [1]. Dawkins himself acknowledged the popularity of his *The God Delusion* in a later publication, *Brief Candle in the Dark: My Life in Science* [2]. The Galaxy British Book Awards honoured Dawkins as the ‘Author of the Year’. Today, Dawkins’ *The God Delusion* can be read in more than 35 languages [2].

But *The God Delusion* has also received some criticism [3]. Terry Eagleton argues that Dawkins’ claims against religion and God are all straw man arguments [4]. For Alister McGrath, Dawkins’ *The God Delusion* is just a manifestation of a lack of Christian theological knowledge [5]. Similarly, David Bentley Hart postulates that Dawkins could be led to right thinking were he to humble himself to be taught ancient Christian Theology so he could grasp Aquinas’ positive theistic arguments [6]. Similar points are raised against *The God Delusion* by scholars such as Alvin Plantinga [7], Anthony Kenny [8],

*E-mail: dei.daniel@vvu.edu.gh; tel.: +233-244-047879

Thomas Nagel cited in [9], Gregory E. Ganssle [10], Michael Ruse [11], Richard Swinburne cited in [12], H. Allen Orr cited in [13], Antony Flew [14] and Marilynne Robinson cited in [15]. John C. Lennox similarly presents on-going opposition to Dawkins' views [16].

Although the current study follows a similar line of criticism against Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, it sets out to more deeply probe the main ethical-philosophical themes involved in Dawkins' claim that the origin of societal evil is found in theism [17]. Thus the present article studies the connection between theistic beliefs and reality, theism and evil, and the ethical significance of atheism. Through the approach of an ethical inquiry, the article argues that genuine belief in God, rightly understood, neither causes nor condones evil. Rather, evil is caused and maintained by humanity's inordinate desire for self-preservation at any cost. This propensity to self-benefit above other social interests is undoubtedly involved in the broader evolutionary phenomenon referred to as "the survival of the fittest" [18]. Instead of accusing God of the presence and persistence of evil, this article contends that God must be accorded credit for His past, present, and future interventions to redeem humanity from the ills it has plunged itself into by pursuing its self-serving, individualistic desires.

The article provides brief biography about Richard Dawkins. Next, it probes Dawkins' argument in *The God Delusion*. This exploration of *The God Delusion* leads to a section in which the article reflects on emerging themes. These themes are religion and reality, religion and morality, 'belief in God' and evil, and the relevance of atheism. Conclusions are drawn from these themes in support of the thrust of the article.

2. The life of Richard Dawkins

"Dawkins was born on March 26, 1941", in Kenya, East Africa to Clinton John Dawkins and Jean Mary Vyvyan [19]. At age 8, his parents moved to England. In England, Dawkins attended Oundle School in Northamptonshire, England. Here, he was confirmed at the age of thirteen as a member of the Church of England. However, he renounced the Christian faith before his admission into the study of Zoology program in the University of Oxford. Here, Dawkins was influenced by Nikolaas Tinbergen and Bill Hamilton. After graduating in 1962, Dawkins pursued his MA and DPhil studies in Genetics and Aetiology. He earned his DPhil in 1966. Between 1967 and 1969, Dawkins served as assistant professor in Zoology at UC Berkeley. He lectured in Zoology at Oxford University in 1970. Since 1995, he has been the "Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science" [19].

Dawkins has expressed his thoughts on many subjects in some publications. Some of these are *Selective Neurone Death as a Possible Memory Mechanism* (1971), *The Selfish Gene* (1976), *The Extended Phenotype* (1982), *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986), *A Devil's Chaplain* (2003), *The Ancestor's Tale* (2004) and *The God Delusion* (2006). *The God Delusion* has gained fame in

both the academic and the non-academic world. The numerous recognition and awards presented to Dawkins indicate the significant role he performs in the promotion of Science and Reason.

Among contemporary critics of religious faiths, Dawkins is one of four key individuals with similar thoughts. Together with Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris, these individuals have been described as “the four horsemen of the non-apocalypse” [20]. Sometimes, Ayaan Hirsi Ali is added to the list to make her a fifth horsewoman of the non-apocalypse [21].

3. Dawkins' arguments in 'The God Delusion'

In Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, he puts forth his fiercest criticism of monotheistic religions, particularly Christianity. The crux of Dawkins' argument in *The God Delusion* is that religionists have covered the non-existence of God with a false belief purported to prove the existence of an interventionist God irrationally. This mistaken belief has caused a wrong impression of reality among religious adherents to the extent that they carry out immoral activities in the society. Thus, Dawkins concludes that subscribing to the irrational belief that an interventionist God exists is the cause of societal evil.

Dawkins' grand purpose for composing *The God Delusion* was to raise atheism to significant heights [17]. He identifies the notable accomplishments of some renowned atheists. From these examples, he argues that atheists need not hide anymore. He claims atheists can live a more fulfilling lifestyle than they do now. Accordingly, he takes a militant stance against religion in general and Christianity in particular [17, p. 21, 31]. He describes religion as delusional, entailing two or more people inflicted with maladaptive thoughts and behavioural patterns [17, p. 5].

Though Dawkins refers to religion as a whole, the Christian religion receives much of his denigration. For example, he mocks what Christians mean by the usage of the term 'God'. For him, *God* refers to an irrational explanation that Christians give to otherwise natural and scientific happenings in real life situations [17, p. 92, 94]. He sees 'belief in God' as a cloak with which Christians and other religious people use to excuse their unapologetic ignorance of reality. Eventually, the insanity of such a childlike perspective of reality manifests when non-believers interrogate Christians and other religious people on their belief. Instead of responding lucidly, religious people react with much disdain and intolerance that is uncharacteristic even of their interrogators. Dawkins traces the logical outworking of this trenchancy or fundamentalism to much of the evils that society endures concluding that belief in God is the cause of so much evil in our society [17, p. 263].

Rather than the religious conception of Ultimate Reality, Dawkins suggests that the theory of natural selection, advanced by Charles Darwin, offers a better explanation and hope for reality [17, p. 79, 116-117]. He enumerates some benefits to the concept of the survival of the fittest. First, natural selection provides humanity with an opportunity to understand weaknesses inherent in the

human nature. Second, he mentions that the theory helps us explain the attitude of human beings towards evil. Third, he claims that the theory is so functional that it relieves the Christian God of the improbable burden of performing loads of work. Dawkins is favourable towards Peter Atkins' conception of a 'lazy God' who does so little that he need not exist at all, and to Woody Allen's opinion of an 'under-achiever' God [17, p. 144]. For Dawkins, religious beliefs and practices are so impotent that they cannot describe the 'God hypothesis' or the 'Interventionist God' in an understandable manner [17, p. 80-83, 85]. Fourth, he argues that the concept of natural selection has an inherent capacity to expand. Arthur Robert Peacocke describes this capacity as a "propensity for increased complexity" [22]. Dawkins postulates that the theory of natural selection genuinely offers humanity the useful blueprints of living a fulfilling and progressive life apart from the erroneous conception of the existence of God inadequately defended by Thomas Aquinas' fivefold actual theistic argument.

He questions the reason for elevating religion in our present society [17, p. 21, 26]. He claims that religion only seeks to indoctrinate non-religious people to buy into the somehow unproductive and irrational notion of an interventionist God. He probes the reason for according religion such relevance when in actuality it cannot offer an objective and lucid explanation of reality and morality. Dawkins thinks that the only achievement of the 'God hypothesis' is a terrible world full of evil, created and sustained by the same Christian God who purports to redeem it. Consequently, he contends that religion and the God hypothesis should be succinctly discarded on the bases of irrelevance and the promotion of evil in human society [17, p. 19].

4. Reflections

Dawkins thinks that religion and God should be discarded because they inadequately explain reality, enforce morality, and sustain evil in the society. He contends that the concept of natural selection is a better alternative to religion, and consequently suggests that humanity should divert its attention to Atheism. To verify these claims, this section of the study examines the common religious explanation of reality, the relationship between religion and morality, the origin, development, and significance of the theory of natural selection, and the relevance of atheism.

4.1. Religion and reality

Dawkins considers religion as a package of insane worldviews that offers an untenable explanation of reality. His claim is based on perceived weaknesses and negativity in religion that are manifest through immoral and evil practices such as the mass killing of people and illicit sexual behaviour [17, p. 31]. Accordingly, Dawkins points at the apparent contradiction between the content of religion and its product as a reason for its irrelevance.

Granted the plausibility of Dawkins' assertion against religion, one wonders whether atheism could survive the same argument. History attests to several instances of carnage perpetrated by people who did not share a 'belief in God'. For example, much has been said of the brazen atheism of despots like 'Stalin, Pol Pot and Hitler', which led to the death of millions [23, 24]. Atheists may contend that the atrocities were not committed in the name of atheism, but they were undoubtedly committed in its ethical wake. Thus if religion is supposed to be discarded by sanctioning such violence in the human society, then, atheism should be served the same fate since Atheism has also caused much aggression and bloodshed in the society. Refuting the importance of a phenomenon solely by its perceived connection with violence is truly an argument that is founded upon doubtful premise.

Contrary to Dawkins' ill-founded definition of religion, religion is an intimate relationship between an individual or group of individuals and an unseen being(s) expressed in an intensive belief system that engages the comprehensive historic activities of the unseen being(s) and demonstrated in specific ways in which the individual or group of individuals think, act, and feel about reality. Internally, the ethos of religion is indicated by its sacred literature and dogma. These religious resources determine the thought, behavioural, and affective patterns in which religious adherents respond to reality. Externally, religious followers engage in sacraments, worship, cooperative arrangements, and moral lifestyles prearranged by the internal religious elements. In most cases, religious adherents struggle to live out the internal elements of their profess religions. Thus evaluation of religion based solely on the thought, behaviour, and feelings of its adherents is not only simplistic but also inadequate and deceptive.

By inference, therefore, an understanding of the internal elements of religion is of an incontrovertible significance to probing its usefulness. Unfortunately, Dawkins' militant stance against religion is based on the external evidence of religion, orthopraxy rather than the internal elements of religion, orthodoxy and its inner psychological workings. Evaluated from its internal components, it reveals a perspective of an Ultimate Reality that self-exists, immutable, and timeless. Though various religions express the Ultimate Reality differently, and in a somewhat contradictory manner, the general religious perception is that the Universe and its activities emanate and is subsequently sustained by either a personal/impersonal being, or there is a timeless divine principle that controls the world [25, 26]. In Hindu cosmogonies, for example, 'Varuna' [Atharva Veda 4, 16, 3-4], 'Indra' [Atharva Veda 19, 15, 1-2], the 'golden egg' ('Hiranyagarbha') [Rig Veda 10:129], and 'Brahmana' [Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2, 1, 20; Mundaka Upanishad 2, 1, 1] are some of the names variously described as the Ultimate Reality at different times in Hindu belief system. In Buddhist religious thought, Ultimate Reality is considered as a governing principle that determines affairs of both animate and inanimate beings in the Universe [27]. Similar claims are found in Taoist religious thoughts [28, 29].

In Confucianism, this all-pervading governing principle is considered to be a moral law that is timelessly and extensively absolute. The ‘Doctrine of the Mean’ states the ‘moral law’ is universally binding [30]. The three Abrahamic religions present the Ultimate Reality as a personal God. This personal God self-exists (Exodus 3.14), eternal [Surah 112 (Quran)], immutable, omnipotent, omnibenevolent (1 John 4.8), omniscient, and all-pervading (Isaiah 44.6). He is considered as the Creator who brought the universe into being out of nothingness (Psalm 102.25-27). Some variations exist between the descriptions ascribed to this personal God. While the Christian tradition depicts Him as a tri-personal divine entity (Deuteronomy 6.4), the Judeo-Islamic tradition stressed the monotheistic aspect of God and renounced the Christian tri-unitary notion of God as abominable [Surah 5:73 (Quran)].

Such conceptual variations concerning the Ultimate Reality should not be taken as grounds for denigrating religion. The exceptions only prove that religion is at best a human construction of a self-revealing God. It is the perennial struggle of humanity to understand and relate to the unseen being. Like other human narratives, differences and somehow different records are inevitable. The overarching theme needs not be disregarded on the pretext of inconsistencies in the accounts of the same event from different sources. In the same vein, various records of historical events from different sources do not mean that the fact that is being described never took place. Instead, differences in the religious depictions of the Ultimate Reality across cultures and generations indicate the pervasiveness of the religious claim that the universe was caused by a being that has been described as ‘God’. Dawkins may term this being either as ‘the Interventionist God’ or ‘the God hypothesis’. Either way, the different narratives and depictions of this being may indicate the certainty of these religious claims. For this reason, it becomes highly inconceivable to agree with Dawkins that the various religious description of the Ultimate Reality is untenable.

4.2. Religion and morality

Morality refers to the human capacity to decide between right and wrong action or inaction and performing the preferred option accordingly. Dawkins severs the common tie that binds morality to religion [17, p. 211, 227]. He claims morality is the human “sense of right and wrong” [17, p. 23]. The ethos of the “motive for good” is determined by the *zeitgeist*- “spirit of the times” [17, p. 231, 217, 221, 265-268]. As a result, human beings emphasize aspects of morality relevant to specific times and situations. This emphasis has no links with religion [17, p. 227]. Dawkins claims religion is fraught with several immoralities. The Christian Bible, for example, has supported one immorality after the other. These immoralities include Lot’s incest (Genesis 19.31-36), the horrific rape and subsequent killing of “the Levite’s concubine” (Judges 19.23-26, 29), Abraham’s lies to Pharaoh (Genesis 12.18-19), and Abimelech (Genesis 20.2-5), the killing of the Calf worshippers beneath Mount Sinai (Exodus 32.26-

28), the battle of Jericho (Joshua 5.13-6.27), and the application of the death penalty for slightest offences such as incest, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and working on the Sabbath day (Numbers 15; Leviticus 20). For Dawkins, these records of immorality cause the Bible and religion to lose any right they might have had to regulate moral conduct [17, p. 229, 230, 262].

For this reason, Dawkins argues that morality should arise from a source other than religion. He identifies some primary and secondary sources of morality. Dawkins' two primary sources of morality are in-group altruism and reciprocal altruism [17, p. 215-218]. Both are the result of the functioning of a "selfish gene" [17, p. 215]. The selfish gene is a self-distributive gene capable of designing individuals to "survive and reproduce" its kind [31]. While both emanate from general concerns for the welfare of preferred groups and individuals, in-group altruism describes the human capacity to pursue the welfare of others within one's kind and reciprocal altruism is the pursuit of the welfare of others in return for similar actions performed towards the moral agent. Thus in-group altruism sparks communal identity while reciprocal altruism gives rise to prudential morality. Dawkins' secondary sources are "reputation" and "conspicuous generosity" [17, p. 218, 220]. People's desire to be known as moral individuals propels moral actions in moral agents. Also, some individuals perform moral actions as a means of 'advertising' their personalities [17, p. 218].

However, Dawkins' perspective of morality only results in moral relativism and moral subjectivism. His claim that morality is determined by individuals and groups according to the *zeitgeist* of their social and historical milieu implies that morality is limited to the desires and caprices – many of them admittedly positive - of individuals and groups. In such cases, Dawkins' evolving morality becomes less helpful. Consequently, there is a need to look elsewhere for a moral system that surpasses, and yet encompasses, the desires of individuals and groups. Such an honest system would be better able to establish and sustain the moral order through its objectivity, absolutist, and universalist paradigm, qualities notoriously lacking in any relativistic conception of morality.

Dawkins appeals to Kant's 'categorical imperative' and the patriotic fervour as a means of introducing a sort of universalism and absolutism into his limited moral system [17, p. 231, 232]. They meet the same fate. For example, Kant's categorical imperative inadequately determines the ethical conduct in situations where a moral agent has the moral matrix and the means to perform the good but cannot *will* the moral action as a universal *oughtness* [32]. Also, the patriotic fervour limits the moral system to the desires of the state to which the moral agent belongs. It is less helpful in situations where a moral agent ought to decide between the welfare of two nations to which he owes allegiance than in cases where the choice concerns only one country. Unlike Dawkins' evolving moral system, religious-based morality ensures that God-given rules of conduct are universally applied, within the Christian milieu, to all individuals regardless of geographical location, social-historical setting, and specificities of situations [33]. This moral system has inbuilt principles (such as moral hierarchism) for

resolving moral intersections. It is this type of morality that is needed to solve moral issues in real life situations.

4.3. 'Belief in God' and evil

Dawkins' denigration of religion and God stems from his attribution of evil to the so-called "God hypothesis" [17, p. 259]. From Dawkins' perspective, the 'genocidal massacres', 'new *sadomasochism*', earthquakes, floods, the Bible's support for the execution of offenders even for offences that he finds trivial, as well as the apparent taste for blood represented in the theological conception of atonement evidently point to a causative relationship between belief in God and societal evil [17, p. 31, 244-246, 251, 253, 256]. In broader terms, the notion of evil has both 'moral' and 'physical/natural' implications [34]. Moral evil is the performance of prohibited, obligated, or permissible actions/inactions by a human being that affects oneself, others, and God. Physical/natural evil refers either to nonhuman or human actions/inactions performed non-rationally that harm other human beings.

By emphasizing the presence of evil, Dawkins revives the age-old philosophical debate concerning the co-existence of God and evil. According to critics of theism, the presence of evil is incompatible with such a God's existence. They argue that an omnibenevolent and omniscient God who always acts in the interest of his children will exterminate evil from the universe. That evil continues to occur in real situations implies that a powerful and loving God is non-existent. Dawkins, in particular, thinks religion or 'belief in God' is a cover for so much religiously perpetrated violence and bloodshed [17, p. 33, 46, 167]. He draws on the often nasty Christian responses to critics of Christianity as evidence for his claim [17, p. 211-213].

Conventionally, proponents of theism have offered three responses to claims by critics that the presence of evil denigrates the existence of God. First, they claim that the existence of evil in God's creation proves that God, who is inherently perfect in all things, is different from his creation, which is imperfect. The created order draws its perfection from the declaration of the perfect Creator. Second, the existence of evil is an unfortunate reminder of humanity's abuse of free will. Hence, evil is a necessary consequence of the violation of free will allowed by God. Third, 'evil' is a necessity for the 'universe' to optimally support life [35].

One observes from the arguments and responses of both exponents and opponents of the existence or nonexistence of God a trend of either rationality or irrationality. In the current study, we propose that the context of non-rationality may offer a way of navigating through the maze of confusion that has always beset the debate on God's existence or nonexistence. From whichever direction one views the notion of God's existence; one finds that the God hypothesis possesses some capabilities that transcend the irrational-rational divide. Dawkins subtly acknowledges this fact with his assertion that God is 'complex' [17, p. 149]. But more than that, Religion conceives of God as *infinitely* complex, and

so any attempt to study the God hypothesis ought to be done within the context of faith. The context of faith offers the essential social, historical, cultural, philosophical, and psychological framework for understanding the nature and relevance of 'belief in God'. On the converse, all attempts to study the God hypothesis from non-faith contexts will obviously lead to confusion, inaccuracy, as well as limitations and errors in judgment. Dawkins removes God from the faith context and attempts to study this non-rational entity in non-faith contexts [17, p. 60-62, 105]. His use of experimental procedures to study a non-empirical entity like God makes Dawkins' conclusions about theism confused, inaccurate, and limited: surprising, for an avowed man of science and its methodological naturalism. Imagine trying to play chess by following the rules of a football game. Indeed, the mismatch will end up in confusion.

Dawkins' confusion shows up in his full link between evil and theism. Simplistically, he suggests that all the terrible evil we see in the society is perpetrated by religious adherents. While there is no objective data to assess the relevant percentiles, it is lucid to refute such unsubstantiated claims on the basis that non-adherents of religion also perpetrate crimes. That Dawkins, himself, uses abusive and appalling diction in his *The God Delusion* to describe religion and the actions and thoughts of religious adherents underscores the fact that non-religious persons also cause evil in the society. Since the actions/inactions and thoughts of both religious adherents and non-religious adherents cause evil, then, it does not follow to assert that only 'belief in God' is the cause of evil. Within the faith context, there is no causative relationship between God and evil (Job 34.10, Psalms 5.6, Isaiah 31.2, Micah 2.1, 1 John 3.8, Romans 5.12-14, James 1.13). At worst, he allows it to happen as a necessary consequence of free human actions/inactions; He can be accused of no more. As Ultimate Reality, nothing in the created order escapes his superintendence. He allows evil to occur because free human beings make choices some of which yield both moral and physical/natural evil either directly or indirectly [36]. Scientific and technological advancement of the present age should make it easier for us to grasp inevitable unforeseen consequences of some human activities on land, sea, and atmosphere.

By allowing evil to occur as due consequences of free human actions/inactions, God proves his capabilities of holding the moral order in proper check. Moral justice demands a strategic and momentary emphasis on the principles of fairness and firmness at different times and in different situations. Any moral system that only rewards the good but fails to punish the bad is defective. As Ultimate Reality, God is not defective. Rather, He is capable of sustaining the moral order He originated. He shows this through the issuance of reward for good actions/inactions and the issuance of punishment for bad actions/inactions that occur after he has allowed the due consequences of the actions/inactions of moral agents. In the biblical narrative, there are numerous cases where God's punishment was issued as consequences of free human actions/inactions (Genesis 6.12, 4.12; 2 Peter 2.6; Isaiah 13.1-2, 15.1-9, 17.1-14, 19.1-17, 21.1-10, 21.11-12; 45.7). The warfare of the nation of Israel in the land

of Canaan should be understood in this context. God used the nation of Israel as His whip to punish those nations whose actions/inactions deserved punishments. Properly understood, God should be accorded some gratitude for His role in sustaining the moral order in the Universe.

The capacity to commit evil by both religious adherents and non-religious adherents suggests a common denominator for the perpetuation of evil. Rather than blame theism or atheism for the existence of evil, we blame it on the defective human nature that came to be shortly after the creation of humanity. In the biblical narrative, humankind was created to enjoy happiness or evil-free life at the instance of obedience to God. Unfortunately, the first human beings (Adam and Eve) rebelled against God by choosing their ways to evil-free life. As a consequence of their actions, all their offspring are reproduced into a state of being characterized by estrangement from God. Conventional theology describes this situation either as the Fall or the original sin. We prefer the term 'generic sin' [37, 38]. Generic sin describes the inherent attitude of human nature that naturally provides a necessary and sufficient condition for the committal of sin or evil without any obstruction. It illustrates the effect of corruption on the otherwise excellent nature of humanity.

Dawkins' selfish gene concept is positive in one important way. It offers another way to understand the poor human condition in non-religious terms. The concept relies on its famous antecedents: chance and survival of the fittest. The selfish gene reproduces itself into a pool of genes that supports in-group defence and cohesion as well as intergroup respect through reciprocal altruism [17, p. 216]. Whether it is in-group cohesion or intergroup altruistic tendencies, the selfish gene operates in self-preserving terms. By preserving its kind, it ensures the survival of its group against other non-preferred groups [17, p. 215]. Also, it looks out for the welfare of others because it draws some benefit from the continuous existence of beneficiary groups. Self-interest is the baseline of all activities of the selfish gene. The obsession to preserve one's interest without regard to the interests of others has always been the cause of societal evil. From the minutest violence to heinous and unspeakable crimes like genocides, xenophobia, intra and intergroup chauvinism, tribal/ethnic conflicts, serial murders, sexual abuse, pollution, biological warfare, international conflicts, famine, and sadistic hankerings, the human society continues to suffer from the wanton desire to survive and preserve one's kind at 'any cost' [39]. The pervasiveness of evil in the society is not caused by theistic beliefs. Rather, it is caused by uncontrolled human 'desires' to continue 'living' at the possible exclusion of other human beings [36].

4.4. *The relevance of atheism*

The term atheism refers to the view that the supernatural is non-existent and that all attempts to provide evidence for its existence is absurd and nonsensical [40, 41]. According to the atheist, the natural world is all that humanity possesses. For this reason, humanity ought to face the challenges it

encounters in the natural world as it pursues its interest in survival [17, p. 263-264]. It neither alludes to the act of prayer nor expiatory and propitiatory liberation, nor holds no belief in heaven, or hell. Instead, it questions the challenges of life to developing analytical methods of understanding and finding solutions to the identified problems [42]. It is underscored by philosophical approaches such as “materialism” [43] and scientific ones such as “methodological naturalism” [44].

Some reasons may be given to explain why people become atheists. These reasons range from unfamiliarity with theistic claims to a conscious rejection of theistic assertions on the grounds of their apparent ludicrousness. As well, many come to atheism as an emotional-psychological response to the challenges posed by personal loss and suffering. Through outright denial and a decidedly militant stance against theism, Dawkins asserts that he is without belief in God and that theism is unintelligent and nonsensical.

According to George H. Smith, atheism may be broadly classified into two types. These are implicit atheism and explicit atheism [45]. In implicit atheism, the non-belief in God is not based upon a conscious rejection of theism, but instead, it springs from the notion that human beings have no innate knowledge and desire for the supernatural until it has been introduced to them. Implicit atheism describes the state of the individual before he or she can accept or deny belief in a deity. Explicit atheism, on the other hand, expresses non-belief in a god based on an outright and wilful denunciation of theistic beliefs. The basis of this rejection is the notion that theistic assertions are couched within what Dawkins considers absurdity [17, p. 80-83, 85, 92, 94, 129]. As an explicit atheist, it is no surprise that Dawkins repudiates theistic beliefs in the strongest possible terms. Accordingly, he calls for the vilification of religion, installing atheism in its place. He suggests that atheism can reasonably be expected to make the world a better place than theism has done [17, p. 19, 20, 51, 259].

In a unique sense, Dawkins gives a more positive face to atheism than many of his predecessors have been able to accomplish. He goes through significant pains to offer atheism as a better alternative to theism. As a positive belief system, Dawkins' version of atheism needs substantiation for its claims [46]. Unfortunately, Dawkins' version of atheism encounters the same hurdle as theism—the problem of providing shreds of evidence for its absolute claims. While theism describes its beliefs from the perspective of faith, atheism describes its concepts from the context of rational common sense [17, p. 51]. There is no known scientific or empirical explanation for either theistic faith-based claims or atheistic logical common-sense-based claims. Both are based on fundamental, metaphysical propositions. Atheism appears to have no advantage over theism in appealing to science and pragmatic approaches.

Further, Dawkins has claimed that atheists can live a much more fulfilling life than religious adherents. By focusing on real challenges and the quest for solutions of these challenges in the here-and-now, humanity will gain control of the natural world and use it as a resource for pursuing its self-preservation. Such power invests in humanity the right to devise its moral code. Stephen Maitzen

has described this system of morality as “ordinary morality” [47]. However, this will mean that atheism finds functional grounds for resolving the moral problems that flow from moral intersections. As stated already Dawkins’ altruistic selfish gene renders any peaceful resolution of the issues of moral crossings impossible. It is inconceivable how moral agents distributed across the globe and acting in ways that accurately ensure the survival of their preferred kind (survival of the fittest) will naturally abandon this quest to survive for the welfare of another opposing type. The anarchy that might result would be unimaginably gloomy. Theism, on the other hand, avails the resources of moral objectivism, absolutism, and universalism that form a reasonable ground for sustaining the moral order. With its emphasis on chance, survival of the fittest, and natural selection, atheism is forever short of these essential moral resources.

5. Conclusions

This article has evaluated Dawkins’ claim that theism is the cause of all the evil in society. The article has pointed out that Dawkins’ claims against religion appear to be insupportable because he has an incomplete conception of the nature of religion and the religious belief in Ultimate Reality as well as God’s relationship with evil. The dissonance between religious creeds and the thought, behaviour and emotional expressions of religious adherents should not be perceived as an adequate basis for judging particular religions.

Again, Dawkins’ militant stance against theism militates against a right assessment of the logical outworking of his evolving moral system. Based on its egoistic modus operandi underpinning Dawkins’ argument only serves to limit Dawkins’ system of morality, making it relative and subjective. Additionally, Dawkins’ attempt to rationally comprehend God further invokes some confusion. Viewed this way, the notion of God transcends the rational-irrational divide.

In its faith context, the religious idea of God is presented as One in whom there is no evil. In His role as Ultimate Reality, He rewards moral conduct and punishes immoral behaviour by curbing or allowing the natural effects of actions/inactions freely willed by humanity. These effects are sometimes morally sound and at other times evil. In light of this, it could be inferred that the origin of evil is not to be adduced from either theism or atheism. Instead, evil originates from the actions/inactions of humanity who freely act in pursuit of its self-preservation. That the actions/inactions of both religious adherents and non-religious adherents cause, evil is a manifestation that evil flows from an inordinate desire of human beings to survive and be advantaged at all cost. Thus to claim that religious adherents are the sole perpetrators of evil in the society is too simplistic and unconvincing. Consequently, the article recommends that theism should be given its proper significance. For without it, the moral order will crumble at the feet of atheism [48]. Though a discussion of the atheistic views of the three other horsemen plus the horsewoman is external to this article,

it is hoped that further research will respond to these views. Such a feat will strengthen conclusions of this article and related scholarly articles.

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