**Clinton Richard Dawkins 1949 –**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins>

    

**Clinton Richard Dawkins**, [FRS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Society#Fellowship), [FRSL](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Society_of_Literature) (born [March 26](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_26), [1941](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1941)) is a [British](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) [ethologist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethology), [evolutionary biologist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolutionary_biology) and [popular science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_science) writer. He holds the [Charles Simonyi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Simonyi) Chair for the Public Understanding of Science at the [University of Oxford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Oxford) and is a professorial fellow of [New College, Oxford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_College%2C_Oxford).[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-0)[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-1)[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-2)

Dawkins came to prominence with his 1976 book [*The Selfish Gene*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Selfish_Gene), which popularised the [gene-centred view of evolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gene-centered_view_of_evolution) and introduced the term [*meme*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme). In 1982, he made a widely cited contribution to evolutionary biology with the theory, presented in his book [*The Extended Phenotype*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Extended_Phenotype), that the [phenotypic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phenotype) effects of a gene are not necessarily limited to an [organism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organism)'s body, but can stretch far into the environment, including the bodies of other organisms.

In addition to his biological work, Dawkins is well known for his views on [atheism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism), [evolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution), [creationism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creationism) and [religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion). He is a prominent critic of creationism and intelligent design. In his 1986 book [*The Blind Watchmaker*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Blind_Watchmaker), he argued against the [watchmaker analogy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watchmaker_analogy), an argument for the existence of a [supernatural creator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God) based upon the observed complexity of living organisms, and instead described evolutionary processes as being analogous to a *blind* watchmaker. He has since written several popular science books, and has made regular appearances on television and radio programmes, predominantly discussing the aforementioned topics.

Dawkins is an [atheist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheist),[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-education-3)[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-suntimes-4)[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-5) [secular humanist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular_humanism), [sceptic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_skepticism), scientific [rationalist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationalism),[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-6) and supporter of the [Brights movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brights_movement).[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-godisnotgreat-7) He has widely been referred to in the media as "[Darwin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Darwin)'s Rottweiler",[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-discover-8)[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-mohler-9) by analogy with English biologist [T. H. Huxley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Henry_Huxley), who was known as "Darwin's Bulldog" for his advocacy of [natural selection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_selection). In his 2006 book [*The God Delusion*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_God_Delusion), Dawkins contends that a supernatural creator almost certainly does not exist and that religious faith qualifies as a [delusion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delusion) − as a fixed false belief.[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-10) As of November 2007, the [English language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language) version had sold more than 1.5 million copies and had been translated into 31 other languages,[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-11%22%20%5Co%20%22) making it his most popular book to date.

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**Biography**

Richard Dawkins was born on [March 26](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_26), [1941](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1941), in [Nairobi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nairobi), [Colony of Kenya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenya), [British Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire).[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-cv-12) His father, Clinton John Dawkins, was a soldier who moved to Kenya from [England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England) during the [Second World War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) to join the [Allied Forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allies_of_World_War_II),[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-Bio_of_Dawkins-13) returning to England in 1949 when Richard was eight.[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-Bio_of_Dawkins-13) Both of his parents were interested in [natural sciences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_science), and they answered Dawkins' questions in scientific terms.[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-14)

Dawkins describes his childhood as "a normal [Anglican](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglicanism) upbringing", but reveals that he began doubting the existence of [God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God) when he was about nine years old. He later reconverted because he was persuaded by the [argument from design](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argument_from_design), an argument for the [existence of God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existence_of_God) or a creator based on perceived evidence of order, purpose, design or direction − or some combination of these − in nature. However, he began to feel that the customs of the [Church of England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_England) were absurd, and had more to do with dictating morals than with God. Later, when he better understood the process of evolution, his religious position again changed, because he felt that natural selection could account for the [complexity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complexity) of life in purely material terms, rendering a supernatural designer unnecessary.[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-15)

Dawkins attended [Oundle School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oundle_School) from 1954 to 1959. He studied [zoology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoology) at [Balliol College, Oxford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balliol_College%2C_Oxford), where he was tutored by [Nobel Prize](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobel_Prize)-winning ethologist [Nikolaas Tinbergen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolaas_Tinbergen), graduating in 1962. He continued as a research student under Tinbergen's supervision at the [University of Oxford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Oxford), receiving his [M.A.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master_of_Arts_%28Oxbridge_and_Dublin%29) and [D.Phil.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctor_of_Philosophy) degrees in 1966, while staying as a research assistant for another year.[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-cv-12) Tinbergen was a pioneer in the study of animal behaviour, particularly the questions of instinct, learning and choice.[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-Shrage-16) Dawkins' research in this period concerned models of animal decision making.[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-17)

From 1967 to 1969, Dawkins was an assistant professor of zoology at the [University of California, Berkeley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_California%2C_Berkeley). During this period, the students and faculty at UC Berkeley were largely opposed to the ongoing [Vietnam War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War), and Dawkins became heavily involved in the [anti-war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-war) demonstrations and activities.[[19]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-belief_interview-18) He returned to the University of Oxford in 1970 taking a position as a lecturer, and − in 1990 − a [reader](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reader_%28academic_rank%29), in zoology. In 1995, he was appointed Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science at the University of Oxford, a position that had been endowed by [Charles Simonyi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Simonyi) with the express intention that the holder "be expected to make important contributions to the public understanding of some scientific field".[[20]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-19) Since 1970, he has been a fellow of [New College, Oxford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_College%2C_Oxford).[[21]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-20)

In the 1970s Dawkins turned to explaining the life sciences to a popular audience, beginning with his well-known and influential, 1976 book, [*The Selfish Gene*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Selfish_Gene).[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-Shrage-16)

Dawkins has delivered a number of inaugural and other notable lectures, including the [Henry Sidgwick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Sidgwick) Memorial Lecture (1989), first [Erasmus Darwin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erasmus_Darwin) Memorial Lecture (1990), [Michael Faraday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Faraday) Lecture (1991), [T.H. Huxley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Henry_Huxley) Memorial Lecture (1992), Irvine Memorial Lecture (1997), Sheldon Doyle Lecture (1999), Tinbergen Lecture (2004) and [Tanner Lectures](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanner_Lectures) (2003).[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-cv-12) In 1991, he gave the [Royal Institution Christmas Lectures for Children](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Institution_Christmas_Lectures) (released on DVD in 2007 as [*Growing Up in the Universe*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Growing_Up_in_the_Universe)[[22]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-21)). He has also served as editor of a number of prominent journals, and has acted as editorial advisor to [*Encarta Encyclopedia*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encarta_Encyclopedia) and the [*Encyclopedia of Evolution*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclopedia_of_Evolution). He is a senior editor of the [Council for Secular Humanism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_for_Secular_Humanism)'s [*Free Inquiry*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Inquiry) magazine, for which he also writes a column. He has been a member of the editorial board of [*Skeptic*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skeptic_%28magazine%29) magazine since its foundation.[[23]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-22)

He has sat on numerous judging panels for awards as diverse as the [Royal Society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Society)'s [Faraday Award](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faraday_Award) and the [British Academy Television Awards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Academy_Television_Awards),[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-cv-12) and has been president of the Biological Sciences section of the [British Association for the Advancement of Science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Association_for_the_Advancement_of_Science). In 2004, [Balliol College, Oxford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balliol_College%2C_Oxford) instituted the Dawkins Prize, awarded for "outstanding research into the ecology and behaviour of animals whose welfare and survival may be endangered by human activities".[[24]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-23)

In September 2008, Dawkins is due to retire from his post as Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science, due to reaching the university's mandatory retirement age.[[25]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-24)[[26]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-25)

In 1967, Dawkins married fellow ethologist [Marian Stamp](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marian_Stamp_Dawkins), and they divorced in 1984. Later that year, Dawkins married Eve Barham − with whom he had a daughter, Juliet Emma Dawkins − but they too divorced, and Barham died of cancer in early 1999.[[27]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-26) In 1992, he married actress [Lalla Ward](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lalla_Ward).[[28]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-McKie-27) Dawkins had met her through their mutual friend [Douglas Adams](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_Adams), who had previously worked with Ward on the [BBC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC) science-fiction television programme [*Doctor Who*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctor_Who) (in 2008 Dawkins made a cameo appearance as himself in the Doctor Who episode [*The Stolen Earth*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Stolen_Earth)). Ward has illustrated over half of Dawkins' books and co-narrated the audio versions of two of his books, [*The Ancestor's Tale*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ancestor%27s_Tale) and [*The God Delusion*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_God_Delusion).

**Work**

**Evolutionary biology**

*Further information:* [*Gene-centred view of evolution*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gene-centered_view_of_evolution)

In his scientific works, Dawkins is best known for his popularisation of the gene-centred view of evolution. This view is most clearly set out in his books *The Selfish Gene* (1976), where he notes that "all life evolves by the differential survival of replicating entities", and [*The Extended Phenotype*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Extended_Phenotype) (1982), in which he describes [natural selection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_selection) as "the process whereby [replicators](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Replicator) out-propagate each other". In his role as an ethologist, interested in animal behaviour and its relation to natural selection, he advocates the idea that the [gene](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gene) is the principal [unit of selection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unit_of_selection) in [evolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution).

Dawkins has consistently been sceptical about non-adaptive processes in evolution (such as [spandrels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spandrel_%28biology%29), described by [Gould](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_Jay_Gould) and [Lewontin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Lewontin)) and about selection at levels "above" that of the gene. He is particularly sceptical about the practical possibility or importance of [group selection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_selection) as a basis for understanding [altruism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altruism).[[29]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-28) This behaviour appears at first to be an evolutionary paradox, since helping others costs precious resources and decreases one's own [fitness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fitness_%28biology%29). Previously, many had interpreted this as an aspect of group selection: individuals were doing what was best for the survival of the population or species as a whole, and not specifically for themselves. British evolutionary biologist [W. D. Hamilton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._D._Hamilton) had used the gene-centred view to explain altruism in terms of [inclusive fitness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inclusive_fitness) and [kin selection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kin_selection) − that individuals behave altruistically toward their close relatives, who share many of their own genes.[[30]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-29)[[a]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#endnote_anone) Similarly, [Robert Trivers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Trivers), thinking in terms of the gene-centred model, developed the theory of [reciprocal altruism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reciprocal_altruism), whereby one organism provides a benefit to another in the expectation of future reciprocation.[[31]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-30) Dawkins popularised these ideas in *The Selfish Gene*, and developed them in his own work.[[32]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-dawkins79-31)

Critics of Dawkins' approach suggest that taking the [gene](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gene) as the unit of *selection* − of a single event in which an individual either succeeds or fails to reproduce − is misleading, but that the gene could be better described as a unit of *evolution* − of the long-term changes in [allele](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allele) frequencies in a population.[[33]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-32) In *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins explains that he is using [George C. Williams](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_C._Williams)' definition of the gene as "that which segregates and recombines with appreciable frequency".[[34]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-33) Another common objection is that genes cannot survive alone, but must cooperate to build an individual, and therefore cannot be an independent "unit".[[35]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-34) In *The Extended Phenotype*, Dawkins suggests that because of [genetic recombination](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetic_recombination) and [sexual reproduction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_reproduction), from an individual gene's viewpoint all other genes are part of the environment to which it is adapted.

Advocates for higher levels of selection such as [Richard Lewontin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Lewontin), [David Sloan Wilson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Sloan_Wilson), and [Elliot Sober](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elliot_Sober) suggest that there are many phenomena (including altruism) that gene-based selection cannot satisfactorily explain. The philosopher [Mary Midgley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Midgley), whom Dawkins has intermittently debated since the late 1970s,[[36]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-35)[[37]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-36) has criticised gene selection, memetics and sociobiology as being excessively reductionist.[[38]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-37)

In a set of controversies over the mechanisms and interpretation of evolution (the so-called "Darwin Wars"),[[39]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-38) one faction was often named after Dawkins and its rival after [American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) biologist [Stephen Jay Gould](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Jay_Gould), reflecting the pre-eminence of each as a populariser of pertinent ideas. In particular, Dawkins and Gould have been prominent commentators in the controversy over [sociobiology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociobiology) and [evolutionary psychology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolutionary_psychology), with Dawkins generally approving and Gould generally critical.[[40]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-39) A typical example of Dawkins' position was his scathing review of [*Not in Our Genes*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Not_in_Our_Genes) by [Steven Rose](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_Rose), [Leon J. Kamin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_J._Kamin) and Richard C. Lewontin.[[41]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-40) Two other thinkers on the subject often considered to be in the same camp as Dawkins are [Steven Pinker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_Pinker) and [Daniel Dennett](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Dennett); Dennett has promoted a gene-centred view of evolution and defended [reductionism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reductionism) in biology.[[42]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-41) Despite their academic disagreements, Dawkins and Gould did not have a hostile personal relationship, and Dawkins dedicated a large portion of his 2003 book [*A Devil's Chaplain*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Devil%27s_Chaplain) posthumously to Gould, who had died the previous year.

Dawkins' next book, which will marshal empirical evidence supporting the [theory of evolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution), is scheduled to be published in the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) by [Free Press](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Press_%28publisher%29) on [November 24](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/November_24), [2009](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009), the 150th anniversary of the publication of [Charles Darwin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Darwin)'s seminal [*On the Origin of Species*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_the_Origin_of_Species).[[43]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-42)

**Meme**

*Main article:* [*Meme*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme)

Dawkins coined the term *meme* (the cultural equivalent of a gene) to describe how Darwinian principles might be extended to explain the spread of ideas and cultural phenomena.[[44]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-43) This has spawned the field of memetics. Dawkins used the word *meme* to refer to any cultural entity which an observer might consider a replicator. He hypothesised that people could view many cultural entities as capable of such replication, generally through exposure to humans, who have evolved as efficient (although not perfect) copiers of information and behaviour. Memes are not always copied perfectly, and might indeed become refined, combined or otherwise modified with other ideas, resulting in new memes, which may themselves prove more, or less, efficient replicators than their predecessors, thus providing a framework for a hypothesis of [cultural evolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_evolution), analogous to the theory of biological evolution based on genes.[[45]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-44) Since originally outlining the idea in his book *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins has largely left the task of expanding upon it to other authors such as [Susan Blackmore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susan_Blackmore).[[46]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-45)

Although Dawkins coined the term *meme* independently, he has never claimed that the idea itself was entirely a new one − there had been similar expressions for similar ideas in the past. John Laurent, in *The Journal of Memetics*, has suggested that the term may have derived from the work of the little-known German biologist [Richard Semon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Semon).[[47]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-mneme-46) In 1904, Semon published *Die Mneme* (which appeared in English in 1924 as *The Mneme*). Semon's book discussed the cultural transmission of experiences, with insights parallel to Dawkins'. Laurent also found the term *mneme* used in [Maurice Maeterlinck](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurice_Maeterlinck)'s *The Life of the White Ant* (1926), and highlighted the similarities to Dawkins' concept.[[47]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-mneme-46)

**Criticism of creationism**

Dawkins is a prominent critic of [creationism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creationism), the religious belief that [humanity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human), [life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life) and the [universe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universe) were created by a [deity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deity). He has described it as a "preposterous, mind-shrinking falsehood,"[[48]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-47) and his 1986 book, [*The Blind Watchmaker*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Blind_Watchmaker), contains a sustained critique of the [argument from design](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teleological_argument), an important creationist argument. In the book, Dawkins argued against the [watchmaker analogy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watchmaker_analogy) made famous by the 18th-century [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England) [theologian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theology) [William Paley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Paley) in his book *Natural Theology*. Paley argued that, just as a watch is too complicated and too functional to have sprung into existence merely by accident, so too must all living things, with their far greater complexity, be purposefully designed. According to Dawkins, however, natural selection is sufficient to explain the apparent functionality and non-random complexity of the biological world, and can be said to play the role of watchmaker in nature, albeit as an automatic, nonintelligent, *blind* watchmaker.[[49]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-48)

In 1986, Dawkins participated in the [Oxford Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxford_Union)'s [Huxley Memorial Debate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huxley_Memorial_Debate), in which he and English biologist [John Maynard Smith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Maynard_Smith) debated [Young Earth creationist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_Earth_creationism) [A. E. Wilder-Smith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._E._Wilder-Smith) and Edgar Andrews, president of the Biblical Creation Society.[[b]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#endnote_bnone) In general, however, Dawkins has followed the advice of his late colleague Stephen Jay Gould and refused to participate in formal debates with creationists because doing so would give them the "oxygen of respectability" they crave. He suggests that creationists "don't mind being beaten in an argument. What matters is that we give them recognition by bothering to argue with them in public."[[50]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-49)

In a December 2004 interview with American journalist [Bill Moyers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Moyers), Dawkins said that "among the things that science does know, evolution is about as certain as anything we know". When Moyers questioned him on the [use of the word *theory*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution_as_theory_and_fact), Dawkins stated that "evolution has been observed. It's just that it hasn't been observed while it's happening." He added that "it is rather like a detective coming on a murder after the scene... the detective hasn't actually seen the murder take place, of course. But what you do see is a massive clue ... Huge quantities of circumstantial evidence. It might as well be spelled out in words of English."[[51]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-50)

Dawkins has ardently opposed the inclusion of [intelligent design](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligent_design) in science education, describing it as "not a scientific argument at all, but a religious one".[[52]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-51) He has been a strong critic of the British organisation [Truth in Science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_in_Science), which promotes the teaching of creationism in state schools, and he plans − through the [Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins_Foundation_for_Reason_and_Science) − to subsidise the delivering of books, [DVDs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DVD) and [pamphlets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pamphlet) to schools, in order to counteract what he has described as an "educational scandal".[[53]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-52)

**Atheism and rationalism**

Dawkins is an outspoken [atheist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism) and a prominent [critic of religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_religion). He is an Honorary Associate of the [National Secular Society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Secular_Society),[[54]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-53) a vice-president of the [British Humanist Association](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Humanist_Association) (since 1996),[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-cv-12) a Distinguished Supporter of the [Humanist Society of Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanist_Society_of_Scotland),[[55]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-54) a Humanist Laureate of the [International Academy of Humanism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Academy_of_Humanism),[[56]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-55) and a fellow of the [Committee for Skeptical Inquiry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committee_for_Skeptical_Inquiry).[[57]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-56) In 2003, he signed [*Humanism and Its Aspirations*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanism_and_Its_Aspirations), published by the [American Humanist Association](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Humanist_Association).[[58]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-57)

Dawkins believes that atheism is the logical extension of understanding evolution[[59]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-58%22%20%5Co%20%22) and that religion is incompatible with science.[[60]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-59) In his 1986 book *The Blind Watchmaker*, Dawkins wrote:

An atheist before Darwin could have said, following Hume: "I have no explanation for complex biological design. All I know is that God isn't a good explanation, so we must wait and hope that somebody comes up with a better one." I can't help feeling that such a position, though logically sound, would have left one feeling pretty unsatisfied, and that although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.[[61]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-60)

In his 1991 essay "[Viruses of the Mind](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viruses_of_the_Mind)" (from which the term *faith-sufferer* originated), he suggested that [memetic theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memetics) might analyse and explain the phenomenon of religious belief and some of the common characteristics of religions, such as the belief that punishment awaits non-believers. According to Dawkins, faith − belief that is not based on evidence − is one of the world's great evils. He claims it to be analogous to the smallpox virus, though more difficult to eradicate.[[62]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-Is_Science_a_Religion.3F-61) Dawkins is well-known for his contempt for religious extremism, from [Islamist terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamist_terrorism)[[63]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-62) to [Christian fundamentalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_fundamentalism); but he has also argued with liberal believers and religious scientists, from biologists [Kenneth Miller](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_R._Miller)[[64]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-63) and [Francis Collins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Collins_%28geneticist%29)[[65]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-64) to theologians [Alister McGrath](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alister_McGrath) and [Richard Harries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Harries%2C_Baron_Harries_of_Pentregarth).[[66]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-65) Dawkins has stated that his [opposition to religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antireligion) is twofold, claiming it to be both a source of conflict and a justification for belief without evidence.[[67]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-66) However, he describes himself as a "cultural Christian",[[68]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-67%22%20%5Co%20%22) and proposed the slogan "Atheists for Jesus".[[69]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-68)

Following the [September 11, 2001 attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11%2C_2001_attacks), when asked how the world might have changed, Dawkins responded:

Many of us saw religion as harmless nonsense. Beliefs might lack all supporting evidence but, we thought, if people needed a crutch for consolation, where's the harm? September 11th changed all that. Revealed faith is not harmless nonsense, it can be lethally dangerous nonsense. Dangerous because it gives people unshakeable confidence in their own righteousness. Dangerous because it gives them false courage to kill themselves, which automatically removes normal barriers to killing others. Dangerous because it teaches enmity to others labelled only by a difference of inherited tradition. And dangerous because we have all bought into a weird respect, which uniquely protects religion from normal criticism. Let's now stop being so damned respectful![[70]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-69)

Dawkins has especially risen to prominence in contemporary public debates relating science and religion since the publication of his 2006 book *The God Delusion*, which has achieved greater sales figures worldwide than any of his other works to date. Its success has been seen by many as indicative of a change in the contemporary cultural [zeitgeist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeitgeist), central to a recent rise in the popularity of atheistic literature.[[71]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-70)[[72]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-71) *The God Delusion* was praised by many intellectuals including the Nobel laureate chemist Sir [Harold Kroto](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Kroto), psychologist [Steven Pinker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_Pinker) and the Nobel laureate biologist [James D. Watson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_D._Watson).[[73]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-72) In the book, Dawkins argued that atheists should be proud, not apologetic, because atheism is evidence of a healthy, independent mind.[[74]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-The_God_Delusion.2C_3-73) He sees education and [consciousness-raising](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consciousness_raising) as the primary tools in opposing what he considers to be religious dogma and indoctrination.[[19]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-belief_interview-18)[[75]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-bright-74)[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-education-3) These tools include the fight against certain stereotypes, and he has adopted the term [*Bright*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brights_movement) as a way of associating positive public connotations with those who possess a [naturalistic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturalism_%28philosophy%29) worldview.[[75]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-bright-74) Dawkins notes that feminists have succeeded in arousing widespread embarrassment at the routine use of "he" instead of "she". Similarly, he suggests, a phrase such as "Catholic child" or "Muslim child" should be considered just as socially absurd as, for instance, "Marxist child": children should not be classified based on their parents' ideological beliefs.[[75]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-bright-74) According to Dawkins, there is no such thing as a Christian child or a Muslim child.[[74]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-The_God_Delusion.2C_3-73)

In January 2006, Dawkins presented a two-part television documentary entitled [*The Root of All Evil?*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Root_of_All_Evil%3F), addressing what he sees as the malignant influence of religion on society. The title itself is one with which Dawkins has repeatedly expressed his dissatisfaction.[[76]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-75) Critics have said that the programme gave too much time to marginal figures and extremists, and that Dawkins' confrontational style did not help his cause;[[77]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-76)[[78]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-77) Dawkins rejected these claims, citing the number of moderate religious broadcasts in everyday media as providing a suitable balance to the extremists in the programmes. He further remarked that someone who is deemed an "extremist" in a religiously moderate country may well be considered "mainstream" in a religiously conservative one.[[79]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-78) The unedited recordings of Dawkins' conversations with Alister McGrath and Richard Harries, including material unused in the broadcast version, have been made available online by the [Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins_Foundation_for_Reason_and_Science).[[80]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-79)

Oxford theologian Alister McGrath maintains that Dawkins is "ignorant" of [Christian theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_theology), and therefore unable to engage religion and faith intelligently.[[81]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-80) In reply, Dawkins asks "do you have to read up on leprechology before disbelieving in [leprechauns](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leprechaun)?",[[82]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-81) and − in the paperback edition of *The God Delusion* − he refers to the [American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) biologist [PZ Myers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PZ_Myers), who has satirized this line of argument as "[The Courtier's Reply](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharyngula_%28blog%29#The_Courtier.27s_Reply)".[[83]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-Pharyngula_2006-12-24-82) Dawkins had an extended debate with McGrath at the 2007 [*Sunday Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunday_Times) Literary Festival.[[84]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-83)

Another Christian philosopher, [Keith Ward](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Ward), explores similar themes in his 2006 book [*Is Religion Dangerous?*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Is_Religion_Dangerous%3F), arguing against the view of Dawkins and others that religion is socially dangerous. Criticism of *The God Delusion* has come from philosophers such as Professor John Cottingham of the [University of Reading](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Reading).[[85]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-84) Other commentators, including [ethicist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethicist) [Margaret Somerville](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Somerville),[[86]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-85) have suggested that Dawkins "overstates the case against religion",[[87]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-86) particularly its role in human conflict. Many of Dawkins' defenders claim that critics generally misunderstand his real point. During a debate on Radio 3 Hong Kong, David Nicholls, writer and president of the [Atheist Foundation of Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheist_Foundation_of_Australia), reiterated Dawkins' sentiments that religion is an "unnecessary" aspect of global problems.[[88]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-87)

Dawkins argues that "the existence of God is a scientific hypothesis like any other".[[89]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-88) He disagrees with [Stephen Jay Gould](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Jay_Gould)'s principle of [nonoverlapping magisteria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Jay_Gould#Nonoverlapping_Magisteria_.28NOMA.29) (NOMA). In an interview with [*Time*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_%28magazine%29) magazine, Dawkins said:

I think that Gould's separate compartments was a purely political ploy to win middle-of-the-road religious people to the science camp. But it's a very empty idea. There are plenty of places where religion does not keep off the scientific turf. Any belief in miracles is flat contradictory not just to the facts of science but to the spirit of science.[[90]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-89)

Astrophysicist [Martin Rees](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Rees%2C_Baron_Rees_of_Ludlow) has suggested that Dawkins' attack on mainstream religion is unhelpful.[[91]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-90) Regarding Rees' claim in his book *Our Cosmic Habitat* that "such questions lie beyond science", Dawkins asks "what expertise can theologians bring to deep cosmological questions that scientists cannot?"[[92]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-91)[[93]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-92) Elsewhere, Dawkins has written that "there's all the difference in the world between a belief that one is prepared to defend by quoting evidence and logic, and a belief that is supported by nothing more than tradition, authority or revelation."[[62]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-Is_Science_a_Religion.3F-61) As examples of "good scientists who are sincerely religious", Dawkins names [Arthur Peacocke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Peacocke), [Russell Stannard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russell_Stannard), [John Polkinghorne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Polkinghorne) and [Francis Collins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Collins_%28geneticist%29), but says "I remain baffled ... by their belief in the details of the Christian religion."[[94]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-93)[[95]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-94)[[96]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-95)[[97]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-96)[[98]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-97) He has said that the publication of *The God Delusion* is "probably the culmination" of his campaign against religion.[[99]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-98)

In 2007, Dawkins founded the [Out Campaign](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Out_Campaign) to encourage atheists worldwide to declare their stance publicly and proudly.[[100]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-rd-out-annouce-99) Inspired by the [gay rights movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gay_Liberation), Dawkins hopes that atheists' identifying of themselves as such, and thereby increasing public awareness of how many people hold these views, will reduce the negative opinion of atheism among the religious majority.[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-suntimes-4)[[101]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-100)

**Richard Dawkins Foundation**

*Main article:* [*Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins_Foundation_for_Reason_and_Science)

In 2006, Dawkins founded the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science (RDFRS), a [non-profit organization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-profit_organization). The foundation is in developmental phase. It has been granted charitable status in the [United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) and the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States). RDFRS plans to finance research on the [psychology of belief and religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychology_of_religion), finance scientific education programs and materials, and publicise and support [secular](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularity) [charitable organizations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charitable_organization). The foundation also offers [humanist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanism), [rationalist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationalism) and [scientific](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science) materials and information through its website.[[102]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-101)

**Other fields**

In his role as professor for public understanding of science, Dawkins has been a critic of [pseudoscience](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudoscience) and [alternative medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_medicine). His 1998 book [*Unweaving the Rainbow*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unweaving_the_Rainbow) takes [John Keats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Keats)' accusation that, by explaining the [rainbow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow), [Isaac Newton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Newton) had diminished its beauty, and argues for the opposite conclusion. He suggests that deep space, the billions of years of life's evolution, and the microscopic workings of biology and heredity contain more beauty and wonder than do "myths" and "pseudoscience".[[103]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-102) Dawkins wrote a foreword to [John Diamond](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Diamond_%28journalist%29)'s posthumously published *Snake Oil*, a book devoted to debunking alternative medicine, in which he asserted that alternative medicine was harmful, if only because it distracted patients from more successful conventional treatments, and gave people false hopes.[[104]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-103) Dawkins states that "there is no alternative medicine. There is only medicine that works and medicine that doesn't work."[[105]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-104)

Dawkins has expressed concern about the growth of the planet's human [population](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population), and about the matter of [overpopulation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overpopulation).[[106]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-105) In *The Selfish Gene*, he briefly mentions population growth, giving the example of [Latin America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin_America), whose population, at the time the book was written, was doubling every 40 years. He is critical of [Roman Catholic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Church) attitudes to [family planning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_planning) and [population control](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population_control), stating that leaders who forbid [contraception](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_control) and "express a preference for 'natural' methods of population limitation" will get just such a method in the form of [starvation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Starvation).[[107]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-106)

As a supporter of the [*Great Ape Project*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Ape_Project) – a movement to extend certain moral and legal [rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right) to all [great apes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hominidae) – Dawkins contributed an article entitled "Gaps in the Mind" to the *Great Ape Project* book edited by [Paola Cavalieri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paola_Cavalieri) and [Peter Singer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Singer). In this essay, he criticises contemporary society's moral attitudes as being based on a "discontinuous, [speciesist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speciesism) imperative".[[108]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-107)

Dawkins also regularly comments in newspapers and [weblogs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog) on contemporary political questions; his opinions include opposition to the [2003 invasion of Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_invasion_of_Iraq),[[109]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-108) the [British nuclear deterrent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_Trident_programme) and the actions of U.S. President [George W. Bush](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_W._Bush).[[110]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-109) Several such articles were included in [*A Devil's Chaplain*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Devil%27s_Chaplain), an anthology of writings about science, religion and politics.

In the 2007 TV documentary [*The Enemies of Reason*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Enemies_of_Reason),[[111]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-110) Dawkins discusses what he sees as the dangers of abandoning critical thought and rationale based upon scientific evidence. He specifically cites [astrology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology), [spiritualism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritualism), [dowsing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dowsing), alternative faiths, [alternative medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_medicine) and [homeopathy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeopathy). He also discusses how the [Internet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet) can be used to spread religious hatred and conspiracy theories with scant attention to evidence-based reasoning.

## Awards and recognition

Dawkins was awarded a [Doctor of Science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctor_of_Science) by the University of Oxford in 1989. He holds [honorary doctorates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honorary_degree) in science from the [University of Westminster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Westminster), [Durham University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durham_University)[[112]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-111) and the [University of Hull](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Hull), and honorary doctorates from the [Open University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_University) and the [Vrije Universiteit Brussel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vrije_Universiteit_Brussel).[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-cv-12) He also holds honorary doctorates of letters from the [University of St Andrews](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_St_Andrews) and the [Australian National University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_National_University), and was elected Fellow of the [Royal Society of Literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Society_of_Literature) in 1997 and the [Royal Society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Society) in 2001.[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-cv-12)

In 1987, Dawkins received a [Royal Society of Literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Society_of_Literature) award and a [*Los Angeles Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_Angeles_Times) Literary Prize for his book, *The Blind Watchmaker*. In the same year, he received a *Sci. Tech* Prize for Best Television Documentary Science Programme of the Year, for the BBC [*Horizon*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horizon_%28BBC_TV_series%29) episode entitled *The Blind Watchmaker*.[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-cv-12)

His other awards have included the [Zoological Society of London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoological_Society_of_London) Silver Medal (1989), the [Michael Faraday Award](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Faraday_Award) (1990), the Nakayama Prize (1994), the Humanist of the Year Award (1996), the fifth [International Cosmos Prize](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Cosmos_Prize) (1997), the [Kistler Prize](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kistler_Prize) (2001), the [Medal of the Presidency of the Italian Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medal_of_the_Presidency_of_the_Italian_Republic) (2001) and the Bicentennial Kelvin Medal of [The Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Royal_Philosophical_Society_of_Glasgow) (2002).[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-cv-12)

Dawkins topped [*Prospect*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prospect_%28magazine%29) magazine's 2004 list of the top 100 public British intellectuals, as decided by the readers, receiving twice as many votes as the runner-up.[[113]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-112)[[114]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-113) He has been short-listed as a candidate in their 2008 follow-up poll.[[115]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-114) In 2005, the [Hamburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamburg)-based [Alfred Toepfer Foundation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Toepfer_Stiftung_F.V.S.) awarded him its [Shakespeare Prize](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare_Prize) in recognition of his "concise and accessible presentation of scientific knowledge". He won the [Lewis Thomas Prize for Writing about Science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewis_Thomas_Prize) for 2006 and the [Galaxy British Book Awards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galaxy_British_Book_Awards) Author of the Year Award for 2007.[[116]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-115) In the same year, he was listed by *Time* magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2007,[[117]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-116) and was awarded the [Deschner Award](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giordano_Bruno_Foundation#Deschner_Award), named after [Karlheinz Deschner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karlheinz_Deschner).[[118]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-117)

Since 2003, the [Atheist Alliance International](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheist_Alliance_International) has awarded a prize during its annual conference, honoring an outstanding atheist whose work has done most to raise public awareness of atheism during that year. It is known as the [Richard Dawkins Award](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins_Award), in honor of Dawkins' own work.[[119]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-118)

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* [*The Enemies of Reason*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Enemies_of_Reason) (2007)

On [September 30](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_30), [2007](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007), Dawkins, [Daniel Dennett](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Dennett), [Sam Harris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Harris_%28author%29) and [Christopher Hitchens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Hitchens) discussed their views on [atheism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism) and [religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion), amongst themselves. The talk was filmed and entitled *Discussions with Richard Dawkins, Episode One: The Four Horsemen*.[[120]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-119) Episode Two in the series, a short segment of which has already been released,[[121]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-120%22%20%5Co%20%22) will feature a 90-minute conversation between Dawkins and [PZ Myers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PZ_Myers).

## Notes

**a.** [***^***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#ref_anone)  [W. D. Hamilton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._D._Hamilton) hugely influenced Dawkins and the influence can be seen throughout Dawkins' book *The Selfish Gene*.[[19]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-belief_interview-18) They became friends at Oxford and following Hamilton's death in 2000, Dawkins wrote his obituary and organised a [secular](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularity) memorial service.[[122]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-121)

**b.** [***^***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#ref_bnone)  The debate ended with the motion "That the doctrine of creation is more valid than the theory of evolution" being defeated by 198 votes to 15, according to a report reproduced on the [American Association for the Advancement of Science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Association_for_the_Advancement_of_Science) site. However, the voice of the teller of the vote on the video is not clear enough to discern the exact number of persons in support of the motion.[[123]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins#cite_note-122)

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## External links

**General**

* [Official website](http://www.richarddawkins.net)
* [Richard Dawkins' page on Academia.edu](http://oxford.academia.edu/RichardDawkins)
* [The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science](http://www.richarddawkinsfoundation.org)
* [The Current Simonyi Professor: Richard Dawkins](http://www.simonyi.ox.ac.uk/dawkins/index.shtml)
* [Richard Dawkins](http://www.ted.com/index.php/speakers/view/id/93) at [TED Talks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TED_%28conference%29)
* [Richard Dawkins](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1468026/) at the [Internet Movie Database](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_Movie_Database)
* [Richard Dawkins Resource Page](http://www.unpronounceable.com/dawkins/) – links to videos that include Richard Dawkins, with thumbnails and descriptions.
* [Livejournal community dedicated to discussing Dawkins' ideas and activities](http://community.livejournal.com/richarddawkins/profile)
* [Dawkins at the Clinton School](http://clintonschoolspeakers.com/speaker/view/richard-dawkins/) – Lecture and Q&A Session

**Selected writings**

* [Viruses of the Mind](http://cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/Dawkins/viruses-of-the-mind.html) (1993) – Religion as a mental virus.
* [The Real Romance in the Stars](http://www.world-of-dawkins.com/Dawkins/Work/Articles/1995-12romance_in_stars.htm) (1995) – A critical view of [astrology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrology).
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* [Snake Oil and Holy Water](http://www.forbes.com/asap/1999/1004/235_print.html) (1999) – Suggests that there is no convergence occurring between science and theism.
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* [Race and Creation](http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/article_details.php?id=6467) (2004) – On [race](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_%28classification_of_human_beings%29), its usage and a theory of how it evolved.
* [The giant tortoise's tale](http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0%2C%2C1416876%2C00.html), [The turtle's tale](http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0%2C%2C1425412%2C00.html) and [The lava lizard's tale](http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0%2C%2C1429962%2C00.html) (2005) – A series of three articles written after a visit to the [Galápagos Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gal%C3%A1pagos_Islands).
* [Dawkins' *Huffington Post* articles](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-dawkins)

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[*The Selfish Gene*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Selfish_Gene) (1976) **·** [*The Extended Phenotype*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Extended_Phenotype) (1982) **·** [*The Blind Watchmaker*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Blind_Watchmaker) (1986) **·** [*River out of Eden*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_out_of_Eden) (1995) **·** [*Climbing Mount Improbable*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climbing_Mount_Improbable) (1996) **·** [*Unweaving the Rainbow*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unweaving_the_Rainbow) (1998) **·** [*A Devil's Chaplain*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Devil%27s_Chaplain) (2003) **·** [*The Ancestor's Tale*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ancestor%27s_Tale) (2004) **·** [*The God Delusion*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_God_Delusion) (2006)

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