

# AN ENLIGHTENED PHILOSOPHY

**CAN AN ATHEIST BELIEVE ANYTHING?**

Presentation of the book by Geoff Crocker

# OVERVIEW – A FRESH SYNTHESIS

- Postmodernity in crisis
  - Brave New World and NICE decade over
  - Banks collapsing, consumer and government debt leading to economic cuts
- Enlightenment scepticism becomes militant atheism
- Stale confrontation between atheism and religion needs a fresh synthesis
  - Contemporary thinking to recognise metaphysical human reality
  - Religion to recognise the strength of myth to feed social meta-narrative and personal values

# WHY PEOPLE DON'T BELIEVE

## 1: CREATION, COMPLEXITY, DARWIN AND DAWKINS

- Nature is wondrous but also hostile and destructive
- Charles Darwin challenges creationism with evolution – the fossil record shows species are not immutable
- William Paley's watchmaker argument challenged by
  - David Hume re dysfunctionality in nature
  - and is God only a designer?
- Richard Dawkins' argument that complexity can evolve without design
- Richard Dawkins' militant atheism in 'The God Delusion'

# DARWIN IN MORE DETAIL

- Darwin's theory rests on 8 assumptions
- **prolific reproduction of species**
  - 2 elephants would produce 15m elephants in 500 years 😊
  - – Malthus part 1
- **a resource constraint**
  - prolific population growth exceeds resources necessary for life
  - – Malthus part 2
- **mutation**
  - Darwin considered mutation to be entirely random
  - – Lamarck thought it was led by habitat
- **inheritance**
  - Darwin thought inheritance of characteristics and mutations to be by 'blending'
  - – a weak point in his theory

# DARWIN IN MORE DETAIL

- **natural selection**
  - this could be by climate, food resource constraint, catastrophe, invasion or predation – Darwin appears to favour predation
- **geographic isolation**
  - Darwin thought this assumption was unnecessary
  - but without it mutations would cancel out if inheritance is by blending
- **cumulative enhancement**
  - best mutations cumulate, but is this random?
- **time**
  - Darwin said 300m years but the assumption is often billions of years

# PROBLEMS WITH DARWINISM

## 1: PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY DARWIN

- **PROBLEM** There are no transitional forms in the fossil record  
**ANSWER** The fossil record is incomplete
- **PROBLEM** Natural selection produces eclectic outcomes  
**ANSWER** ?
- **PROBLEM** How can instincts evolve by natural selection?  
**ANSWER** 'I can see no difficulty'
- **PROBLEM** The progeny of crossed species are infertile eg the mule  
**ANSWER** 'no explanation is offered'
- **PROBLEM** Altruism  
**ANSWER** Agreed and nearly caused Darwin to abandon his theory

# PROBLEMS WITH DARWINISM

## 2: CONTEMPORARY 19TH CENTURY CRITIQUE

- Richard Owen (Darwin called him 'our greatest palaeontologist') pointed out
- Alternative theories eg saltation, orthogenesis, premature birth deviation should be considered alongside Darwinian natural selection
- Not true for Darwin to say that 'all the most eminent palaeontologists maintained the immutability of the species'
- Not true that everyone considered that 'each species was independently created' Many contemporary scientists accepted mutation but not natural selection
- Darwin's mechanism should be explained in greater detail – the claimed evolution of not one contemporary species is fully explained
- An indefinite time assumption will allow any theory !

# PROBLEMS WITH DARWINISM

## 3: FURTHER ISSUES

- **Over production of species**
  - Not necessarily true eg human contraception
  - eg preyed species populations in equilibrium
- **Mutation**
  - Random rather than adaptive mutation would take longer to lead to evolution
  - Saltations are observed
- **Inheritance**
  - Blending would cancel out mutations
- **Gradual cumulative enhancement**
  - A long series of cumulative random mutations matched with random contexts is needed – eg light sensitive skin mutation has some advantage, mates with others, mutates version 2, mates with others, mutates version 3 etc to the eye?
  - It's an idea but there's no data, eg the giraffe neck



# PROBLEMS WITH DARWINISM

## 3: FURTHER ISSUES

- **Natural selection**
  - Mutation is random but selection by a logic? Other permutations possible.
  - Famous challenge of tautology not fully answered
  - – no independent criteria of fitness
- **Testability and irrefutability**
  - Fails Karl Popper's test for a scientific methodology
  - (Popper later recants this challenge)
- **Alternative scenarios to evolution not considered**
  - eg extinction, proliferation, equilibrium
  - eg more general random, prolific, constrained mutation or adaptive mutation

# PROBLEMS WITH DARWINISM

## 4: THE PROBLEMS OF INHERITANCE AND ALTRUISM - THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY NEO DARWINISM SYNTHESIS

- **INHERITANCE**

- Mendel's work on peas showed the effect of dominant genes saved Darwinism from its problem of 'blending' inheritance cancelling out mutations

- **ALTRUISM**

- W D Hamilton proposed that
- only relatives behave altruistically towards each other
- this is because relatives bear the same gene
- hence the theory of 'the selfish gene'
- Richard Dawkins appropriated and disseminated Hamilton's theory

**RESULT = CURRENT DARWIN/MENDEL/HAMILTON SYNTHESIS**

# PROBLEMS WITH DARWINISM

## 4: THE PROBLEMS OF INHERITANCE AND ALTRUISM - THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY NEO DARWINISM SYNTHESIS

BUT

- Hamilton's theory = mathematical model : no empirical study that
  - relatives carry the same gene
  - relatives have some mechanism for recognition
  - altruism or cooperative behaviour is always discriminatory towards relatives
- Hamilton was a determined eugenicist and had a strong perverse agenda

SO

- More uncertainty persists than is claimed
- Neo Darwinist biology assumes species seek to maximise quantitative reproduction – but this is clearly not true of the human species

# PROBLEMS WITH DARWINISM

## 5: POSSIBLE (BUT NOT NECESSARY) IMPLICATIONS

- There is no God – Dawkins' 'God Delusion'
- There is therefore no exogenous moral code for humanity
- There is therefore no role in society for church, mosque or temple
- There is no purpose in life
- Superior human races will/should compete against inferior races to eliminate them
- Human eugenics programmes should be implemented
- Human society should favour a top performing elite
- Human economic life should be unfettered competitive free market capitalism
- There should be no social welfare programmes

# WHY PEOPLE DON'T BELIEVE

## 2: CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHERS

- Terry Eagleton
  - Dawkins and Hitchens should critique science and modernity as they do religion
- John Lennox
  - Rationality and 'irreducible complexity' in nature argue for design
- Simon Blackburn
  - Dismisses philosophical arguments for existence of God
- Andre Comte-Sponville
  - Can't accept a God who 'abandons gazelles to tigers and children to cancer'
- Julian Baggini
- John Humphrys
  - BBC radio interviews with UK Archbishop of Canterbury, Chief Rabbi, and Moslem leader fail to convince on the existence of God and the suffering of children

# WHY PEOPLE DON'T BELIEVE

## 3: THE HISTORY OF RELIGION

- Diarmaid McCulloch
  - Judicial burning alive of clergy and laity of different persuasions
  - Torture of French Huguenots
  - Anabaptists drowned in river Limmat
  - Calvin agreed to Servetus' execution in Geneva – no objection to the burning
  - Tyndale hung for his English Bible
- Catholic/Protestant violence in Northern Ireland 1915, 1968
- Hostility of current church disputes eg over gender
- Muhammed's massacre of Banu Qurayza Jews AD627
- Hindu/Moslem violence at partition of India 1947
- Hindu/Moslem violence destruction of mosque at Ayodhya 1992
- Religion more often bellicose than pacific

# WHY PEOPLE DON'T BELIEVE

## 4: TECHNOLOGY IS GOD?

- Contraceptive technology, fertility technology, medical technology determine life
- Technology interfaces between humanity and the providence and the hostility of nature
- Health outcomes on balance greatly improved
- Technology has overcome bubonic plague : God didn't
- Technology has driven productivity and lifestyle : not God
- Is technology now in control, an unstoppable process? eg Heidegger, Carson
- Whoever has the best technology wins in battle – might is right

# GLOBAL DISTINCTIVES

- **European cynicism**
  - Low church attendance
  - Cartesian doubt rules
  - Devastation of 2 continental wars
  - Holocaust
  - Separation of church and culture
- **American believerism**
  - Separation of church and state
  - Creative, entrepreneurial society
  - Less reliance on historic institutions
- **Asian religion**
  - Holistic aspect of life
  - Intellectual doubt less relevant



# A HOLISTIC HISTORY OF HUMANITY

- **Greek philosophy** – Platonic superiority of mind/spirit over body/emotion
- **Roman empire** – carnal carnival
- **Huns and Dark Ages** – physicality and dark spirituality
- **Enlightenment** – re-assertion of dominance of rationality and mind over body/emotion
  - **C16th century** - Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler
  - **C17th century** - Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Newton, Leibniz, Vico
  - **C18th century** - Voltaire, Hume, Diderot, Rousseau, La Mettrie, d'Holbach, Kant, Hegel
- **Enlightenment = methodology**, not content ; a process, not a conclusion
  - Anthropocentric world view
  - Physicalism
  - Endogenous metaphysics
  - Human consciousness
  - Reason
  - Reasonableness

# ENLIGHTENMENT ISSUES

- Cause, choice and chance
- Reason  $\neq$  Reasonable
- A deterministic or stochastic world?
- Newton's force, Maxwell's field, Popper's propensity themselves unexplained
- What determines outcomes in the universe / in life?
  - Competitive capability
  - Chance
  - Cause, logic analysis
  - Power
  - Desire and choice
  - The status quo
- The Goldilocks Enigma
- Is logic, is mathematics exogenous, mind-independent?
- If so, how ????

# THE CHURCH IN MODERNITY

- Evangelical doctrinal
- Charismatic phenomenological
- Catholic ritual

## TOWARDS A SYNTHESIS

- Physicalism and incarnation
- The soul – not so important whether separate or not
- The divine – if God doesn't exist, then specify a divine (Voltaire paraphrased 😊)
- Myth – the significance of strong myth
- Foundations for a social meta-narrative

## THE SOURCE OF VIRTUE ?

- eg **Whence mercy?**
- An external God who is mercy, who owns and offers mercy?
- A random mutation, enhancing fitness for competitive survival?
  - Or maybe a neutral 'exaptation'?
  - Or maybe inferior for survival to a mutation for merciless behaviour? ☹️
- An independent metaphysic?
- A cognitive human notion? A choice to deify mercy?
- We may not know, we may never know, but does it matter for our options?

## THE SOURCE OF VICE ?

- eg **Whence hatred?**
- An external Devil who is hate, and offers hate? Back to dualism ☹️
- A random mutation, enhancing fitness for competitive survival?
  - Or maybe a neutral 'exaptation'?
  - Or maybe inferior for survival to a mutation for non-hate behaviour? 😊
- An independent metaphysic?
- A cognitive human notion? A choice to demonise hate?
- We may not know, we may never know, but does it matter for our options?

## ANDRE COMTE-SPONVILLE

### 'A SHORT TREATISE ON THE GREAT VIRTUES'

- Politeness
- Fidelity
- Prudence
- Temperance
- Courage
- Justice
- Generosity
- Compassion
- Mercy
- Gratitude
- Humility
- Simplicity
- Tolerance
- Purity
- Gentleness
- Good faith
- Humour
- Love

# JUSTICE

- Judaic/Christian focus is social justice – a kingdom of justice
  - Isaiah 42/61 'he will make justice shine on the nations, never faltering, never breaking down, he will plant justice on earth'
  - Matthew 5 'blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice'
  - English Bible rendering of 'righteousness' for Hebrew 'tsedeq' and Greek 'dikaiosune' creates sacred/secular divide
  - it's equally rendered 'justice'
  - French and German languages don't have this divide eg 'la justice', 'die Gerechtigkeit'
  - so continental European theological thinking more socially relevant



# JUSTICE

- Justice a pre-requisite leading to peace
  - Psalm 85 'justice and peace have kissed each other'
  - Isaiah 32 'the result of justice will be peace'
  - Malachi 4 'the sun of justice will arise with healing in his wings'
- But justice is undefinable !
  - John Rawls 'maximin' principle of distributive justice
  - Robert Nozick, Isaiah Berlin, Amartya Sen's flute
- Justice needs partners – mercy, truth, generosity, wisdom

# LOVE

- 1 Corinthians 13 Ode to Love
- God is love, God so loves the world, greatest commandment is love, love drives out fear etc
- Make love divine – even for atheism
- Anders Nygren 'Agape and Eros'

## MARKET

- The divine doctrine of the free market – omniscient, omnipotent and soon omnipresent
- But technical market failures
  - monopoly
  - information, price signals etc
  - externalities eg ecology
- And moral questions
  - Should cognitive humanity hand over economic responsibility to the market artefact?
  - What is 'free' about market and for whom?
- Christ famously drove the market out of the temple
- 'Get these out of here! How dare you turn my father's house into a market'
- No doctrine here, but a powerful myth for social meta-narrative
- A prime example of the synthesis of '*An Enlightened Philosophy*'

# INSTITUTIONS

- Institutions – master or servant?
- The law, marriage, family, democracy, the market the state, the church, traffic rules
- The software, enabling human life
- But they fail to adapt and evolve so either wither or dominate and trap
- The Sabbath was a prime institution in Christ's time
- Being challenged about eating from a cornfield on the Sabbath, he said 'Man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man'
- Institutions should serve rather than rule
- Again, no doctrine here, but a profound contribution to social philosophy

## THE ROLE OF THE STATE

- US small state, USSR totalitarian state, Europe *dirigiste* state, Africa tribal state, Asia society-state
- On being challenged to pay tax to the occupying Roman state Christ said 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's'
- Again, no doctrine here, but huge political philosophy

# THE POWER OF MYTH

- Myth – and resurrection
- Myth – and the Trinity
  - Contemplate 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all'
  - A new and different and more meaningful interpretation of trinity
  - Not as doctrine, not as literalism, but as meaning
- Myth – and sibling rivalry
  - For Cain, jealousy led to hatred led to murder of his brother Abel
  - God challenges Cain that there is a better way – ie of self respect
  - Not a doctrine but a powerful myth about a prevalent human issue
- Myth – and fear
  - Phobias abound
  - But 'perfect love casts out fear' – a universal principle available to all

## THE BLESSED LIFE – OLD TESTAMENT

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want*

*He makes me lie down in green pastures*

*He leads me beside quiet waters*

*He restores my soul*

*He guides me in paths of justice for his name's sake*

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will  
fear no evil*

*For you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies*

*You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows*

*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life*

*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever*

## THE BLESSED LIFE – NEW TESTAMENT

*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*

*Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted*

*Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice for they will be filled*

*Blessed are the merciful for they shall be shown mercy*

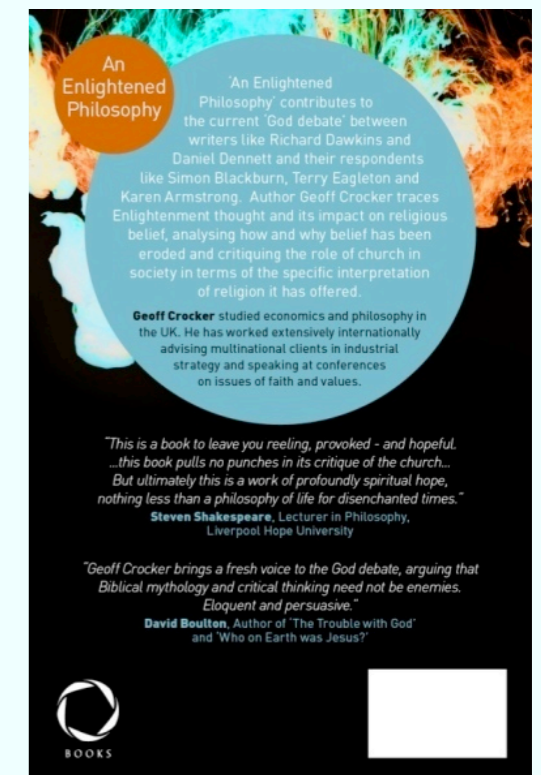
*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God*

*Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of justice for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*



- An exciting book
- Breaking new ground
- Breaking the stale confrontation between atheism and religion with a new synthesis
- Offers a fresh interpretation of religion as strong myth which creates personal and social values
- Contemporary atheism, whilst a valid hypothesis, destroys a source of values without offering any alternative
- The result is moral nihilism and a materialist self centred society which can only be labelled 'consumer society'
- This is much less than a full understanding of human life and society
- Traces the development of philosophy to an atheist position
- Argues that metaphysical concepts are essential to human life and are an aspect of faith
- Proposes a reinterpretation of the religious texts as myth, offering a wide range of examples on themes of justice, love, the market, the role of the state, fear, resurrection and sibling rivalry
- Appeals both to secularists who are looking for an available, accessible and believable interpretation of faith, and to Christians who are keen to present a more relevant interpretation of faith to the contemporary world



## Endorsements - 1

*Geoff Crocker seeks to steer a pathway between traditional theistic religion and other non-rationalistic approaches whilst refusing to settle for the nihilism and amorality implicit in much postmodern culture and thought. He sees usefulness in classical religious myths to augment a pure rationalism, providing enrichment and sustenance to the human search for value and ethics. His criticisms of the Church may be bruising for some Christians to read, but his argument also cuts in an opposite direction to challenge a value-free postmodernism or neo-rationalism and their application in 'the Market' and popular attitudes to moral discourse. Here is a new and clear voice in popular philosophy which deserves a hearing by religious and non-religious readers seeking to make sense of our world today.*

**Paul Roberts**, Dean of Non-residential Training, St Michael's College, Llandaff, Cardiff

## Endorsements - 2

*This is a book to leave you reeling, provoked - and hopeful. Geoff Crocker embraces the death of God, but not the simplistic mantras of Dawkins-style 'new' atheism. Advocating nothing less than a synthesis of the sacred and the secular, he finds a divine power in religious myth even when its supernatural content is stripped away. Make no mistake: this book pulls no punches in its critique of the church, and many will want to argue with its bold claims. But ultimately this is a work of profoundly spiritual hope, nothing less than a philosophy of life for disenchanted times.*

**Steven Shakespeare**, Lecturer in Philosophy, Liverpool Hope University

## Endorsements - 3

*Geoff Crocker brings a fresh voice to the God debate, arguing that Biblical mythology and critical thinking need not be enemies. Eloquent and persuasive.*

**David Boulton**, Author of 'The Trouble with God' and 'Who on Earth was Jesus?'