

Theology and its criticism

Theology in the form of Christian dogma was well indoctrinated into me in my early years of life. But there were so many confusing issues for my young mind. Why were coloured people considered a race of those wanting in the same amount of love as white folk and what really made us more special. An example was when my mother made a grimace and gave a derogatory statement of how ungodly it was seeing a young brown American GI kissing a local lass at the backside of the Central Methodist Church in Blackpool. What followed was a racist rant and not just about kissing. Then there was being led to the altar to sign the Methodist's pledge to forgo drinking alcohol. I didn't have a clue what that was but, ironically, I knew what fornication was and fiddling with females. Not bad for a seven-year-old. But bloody confusing when I had heard more condemnation for that sort of activity. But then, I didn't know what other big words meant at that age, theology being one of them.

In much later years when my swing from that subject was to the extreme end of atheistic belief, I became better read with texts of one academic in the forefront of my reading, Richard Dawkins. Dawkins has been consistently critical of theology as an academic discipline, especially in comparison to the sciences. He has made several public remarks reflecting his scepticism about the value of theology degrees, particularly when it comes to understanding the real world. One of his most quoted sentiments is: *"I don't think theology is a subject at all."*

In interviews and writings, Dawkins argues that theology, unlike science, does not deal with evidence-based inquiry and instead focuses on internally consistent interpretations of texts whose premises he views as unverified or unverifiable. He often contrasts theology with science by emphasizing that science leads to tangible progress and understanding of reality, while theology, according to him, largely revolves around debating the unknowable or the imaginary. In *The God Delusion*, he implies that theology studies "make-believe," and he challenges the idea that one should respect it on the same level as disciplines grounded in evidence and testability. Dawkins has also acknowledged that studying religion from a sociological,

historical, or literary perspective can have academic merit, but he separates this from theology proper, which he sees as based on faith rather than reason.

Richard Dawkins has been vocal in his criticism of theology as an academic discipline. For instance, he has also stated: "Theology is a non-subject. I'm not saying that professors of theology are non-professors. They do interesting things, like study biblical history, biblical literature. But theology, the study of gods, the study of what gods do, presupposes that gods exist." The following quotes illustrate Dawkins' perspective that theology lacks empirical grounding and practical utility:

https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1194.Richard_Dawkins

Several philosophers—especially those aligned with atheism, logical positivism, or scientific naturalism—share Richard Dawkins' critical stance toward theology as an academic discipline. Here's a short list of notable thinkers whose views often parallel or support Dawkins':

Logical Positivists

These thinkers believed that a statement is only meaningful if it can be empirically verified.

- **A.J. Ayer**

In *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), Ayer dismissed theological statements as **literally meaningless** because they can't be tested through empirical observation.

Philosophers of Science / Naturalists

- **Daniel Dennett**

A philosopher of mind and one of the "Four Horsemen" of New Atheism (along with Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens), Dennett argues that **religion should be studied scientifically**—as a natural

phenomenon—not taken at face value. He sees theology as based on unsupported beliefs.

- **Paul Kurtz**

A secular humanist who promoted science and reason over religious belief.

He was a critic of religious faith as a source of moral or epistemological truth.

Critics of Religion in Philosophy

- **Bertrand Russell**

In *Why I Am Not a Christian* (1927), Russell attacked the intellectual credibility of religious belief and questioned the **epistemic legitimacy of theology** as a field.

- **Sam Harris**

Though more known as a neuroscientist and public intellectual, Harris' arguments in *The End of Faith* reflect a philosophical stance that religion—and therefore theology—rests on unjustified assumptions.

Existential Critics

- **Jean-Paul Sartre & Friedrich Nietzsche**

While they didn't comment much on theology as an academic discipline, they undermined its foundations by arguing that **God is either dead or irrelevant** to a meaningful life, rendering theology obsolete in existential terms.

In theology's defence or counter-arguments from philosophy, there are also plenty of thinkers (like Alvin Plantinga or Richard Swinburne) who argue the opposite—that theology, especially analytic theology, has deep philosophical merit.

Public Intellectuals & Writers

Christopher Hitchens

- Author of *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*.
- Argued that theology is **an intellectually bankrupt field**, comparing it to studying fairies or astrology.
- Quote:

“Theology is the effort to explain the unknowable in terms of the not worth knowing.”

Sam Harris

- Neuroscientist and author of *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*.
- Argues that religious faith—and by extension theology—**corrupts reason** and morality.
- Sees theology as built on **unfalsifiable claims**, which puts it outside serious intellectual inquiry.

Stephen Fry

- British actor, writer, and outspoken atheist.
- Has given scathing critiques of religion and theology, particularly on moral grounds (e.g., in his famous "What would you say to God?" interview).
- Thinks theology often tries to **rationalize unjust systems of belief**.

YouTubers & Online Atheist Thinkers

Matt Dillahunty

- Former host of *The Atheist Experience*.
- Engages regularly with theologians and apologists but often points out **logical gaps in theological arguments**.
- Challenges the notion that theology can **"know"** anything real about gods.

Rationality Rules, Cosmic Skeptic, Genetically Modified Skeptic

- All part of the “rationalist/atheist YouTube” scene.

- Frequently critique theology for relying on **circular reasoning** and for lacking epistemological rigour.
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Scientists with Philosophical Leanings

Lawrence Krauss

- Theoretical physicist and author of *A Universe from Nothing*.
- Claims theology **answers nothing** and that science is the only viable path to understanding the universe.
- Quote:

“Theology has made no progress in two millennia.”

Neil deGrasse Tyson

- While more neutral than Dawkins, he’s said he finds theology unhelpful for expanding human knowledge.
- He coined the term “**God of the gaps**” to critique how theology sometimes fills ignorance with divine explanations.

Books That Critique Theology

***The God Delusion* – Richard Dawkins**

The core of Dawkins' argument against religion and theology, laced with evolutionary science and philosophy.

- ♦ Focus: Why religious belief is irrational and theology lacks real substance.

***God Is Not Great* – Christopher Hitchens**

Absolutely savage and eloquent. A broadside against organized religion and theology’s historical and intellectual credibility.

- ♦ Quote: “Religion comes from the period of human prehistory where nobody... had the smallest idea what was going on.”

The End of Faith – Sam Harris

Blends neuroscience, philosophy, and social criticism. Lays out why faith-based thinking (and theology) is dangerous.

- ♦ Especially strong on moral arguments.

A Universe from Nothing – Lawrence Krauss

Not a theology book per se, but offers a science-based counter to theological creationism and the idea of a divine origin.

- ♦ Great if you want cosmological arguments taken apart.

Debates and Talks

"Is Religion Good for the World?" – Hitchens vs. Tony Blair

A legendary debate. Hitchens is in prime form and skewers religious and theological claims with wit and fury.

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Dawkins vs. Rowan Williams (former Archbishop of Canterbury)

A surprisingly respectful debate between science and theology—but Dawkins makes clear his view that theology is **not a real way of knowing**.

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Sam Harris vs. William Lane Craig – “Is Good from God?”

Even though Craig is a theologian/philosopher, Harris gives a solid critique of the **moral emptiness of theological arguments**.

[Watch on YouTube](#)

YouTube Channels Worth Exploring

- **Matt Dillahunty – The Atheist Experience**

Debunks theology live, often with call-in apologists. Great training in spotting fallacies.

[YouTube Channel](#)

- **Rationality Rules**

Clean, well-produced videos dissecting theological arguments, especially around morality and theism.

[Rationality Rules on YouTube](#)

- **Cosmic Skeptic**

Young philosopher breaking down theological arguments, often from a moral or epistemic angle.

[YouTube Channel](#)

Satirical / Witty Critiques of Theology

These authors use **humour, irony, and sarcasm** to slice through theology like a hot knife through dogma.

★ ***Letters to a Christian Nation* – Sam Harris**

Short, snappy, and biting. Like a philosophical roast of American theology.

♦ Quote: *“Theology is now little more than a branch of human ignorance.”*

★ ***The Portable Atheist* – ed. Christopher Hitchens**

A curated anthology of savage anti-theology writings from thinkers like Mark Twain, H.L. Mencken, Bertrand Russell, etc.

- ♦ Great for short jabs and philosophical one-liners.

★ ***God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction* – Richard Dawkins**

A tongue-in-cheek deep-dive into the Old Testament, showing how awful the God character is when taken literally.

- ♦ Less academic, more a theological character assassination (fun read).
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More Academic / Philosophical Critiques of Theology

If you're looking for something more formal but still skeptical of theology, these books deliver deep analysis.

***Why I Am Not a Christian* – Bertrand Russell**

A philosophy classic. Logical, clear, and deeply influential. Dismantles theology's moral and logical claims.

- ♦ Still hits hard nearly a century later.

***Atheism: The Case Against God* – George H. Smith**

Detailed philosophical takedown of religious belief and theological reasoning.

- ♦ Ideal if you're into definitions, epistemology, and logical precision.

***Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* – Daniel Dennett**

Explores religion (and theology) from a scientific/philosophical point of view—like a biologist dissecting a myth.

- ♦ Less aggressive, more analytic.
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Critiques of Specific Theologians & Doctrines

The Impossibility of God – ed. Michael Martin & Ricki Monnier

A collection of academic essays using logic and philosophy to **refute specific theological definitions of God**, especially the omni-properties (omniscience, omnipotence, etc.).

- ◆ Includes critiques of Aquinas-style classical theism.

The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails – ed. John W. Loftus

Written by **ex-pastor turned atheist** John Loftus, this anthology features former believers and philosophers systematically debunking key Christian theological claims.

- ◆ Covers divine hiddenness, resurrection, morality, and biblical scholarship.

God and the Folly of Faith – Victor Stenger

Physicist and philosopher attacks **theistic arguments from design, morality, and cosmology**, especially those used by modern apologists like William Lane Craig.

- ◆ Brutal on "fine-tuning" arguments.

From Faith to Skepticism: Ex-Theologians & Philosophers

Why I Believed – Kenneth W. Daniels

A former missionary explains why he **left Christianity and rejected theology**, giving a reasoned, respectful takedown of evangelical thought.

- ◆ Includes critiques of biblical inerrancy and faith-based epistemology.

Leaving the Fold – Marlene Winell

Psychologist and ex-fundamentalist. Less academic, more psychological—but an amazing resource on **theological indoctrination and recovery**.

- ♦ Coined the term “Religious Trauma Syndrome.”

Analytic Philosophy of Religion: Atheist Responses

These are more densely presented but go head-to-head with top theological thinkers like **Alvin Plantinga**, **Richard Swinburne**, etc.

***Atheism and Theism* – J.J.C. Smart vs. John Haldane**

A structured, academic back-and-forth between an atheist and a theist philosopher. Great for seeing how theology holds up under analytic pressure.

- ♦ Smart’s side is pure rational fire.

***Logic and Theism* – Jordan Howard Sobel**

This is the heavyweight textbook-style critique. Sobel **takes apart all the classical arguments for God** with formal logic and probability.

- ♦ Warning: brain required. But if you're into Plantinga-style stuff, this is the antidote.