

Key concepts

- **Atheos** (Greek) – Without God. In the New Testament this term tends to mean those who have no knowledge of God.
- Other ancient ideas of atheism refer to a rejection of or refusal to worship national or local gods, or that someone is immoral in character.
- Now **'atheism'** is used to refer to those who do not hold any belief in deities, reject belief in deities or believe that there are no deities.
- **New Atheism** tends to refer to those who actively reject belief in God and religion, and work to eradicate it from society on the basis that it is harmful.
- There are different types of Atheism and **Agnosticism**, but the two terms refer to different views about God:
 - Atheism is a rejection of belief in any god or gods and make no positive claims that require proof or supporting evidence.
 - Agnosticism is an uncertainty or reluctance to conclude about the existence of a god or gods. Some argue that it is impossible to know if god exists.
- New Atheism is sometimes called **antitheism** and gained popularity in the wake of 9/11 terrorist attacks that were believed to be caused by religion.
 - **Non-thinking** – New Atheists like Richard Dawkins argue that religion teaches people to be satisfied with not understanding the word and that there is no evidence to support belief.
 - **Infantile** – New Atheists argue that religion teaches people to accept without question. They teach limited, simplistic stories about the universe, limit the believer's understanding and present God as a horrible being to be feared.
 - Impedes scientific progress – Christopher Hitchens claims religion works against reason, restricting science teaching in schools concerning evolution and controlling policy making around health care, medicine, and research.

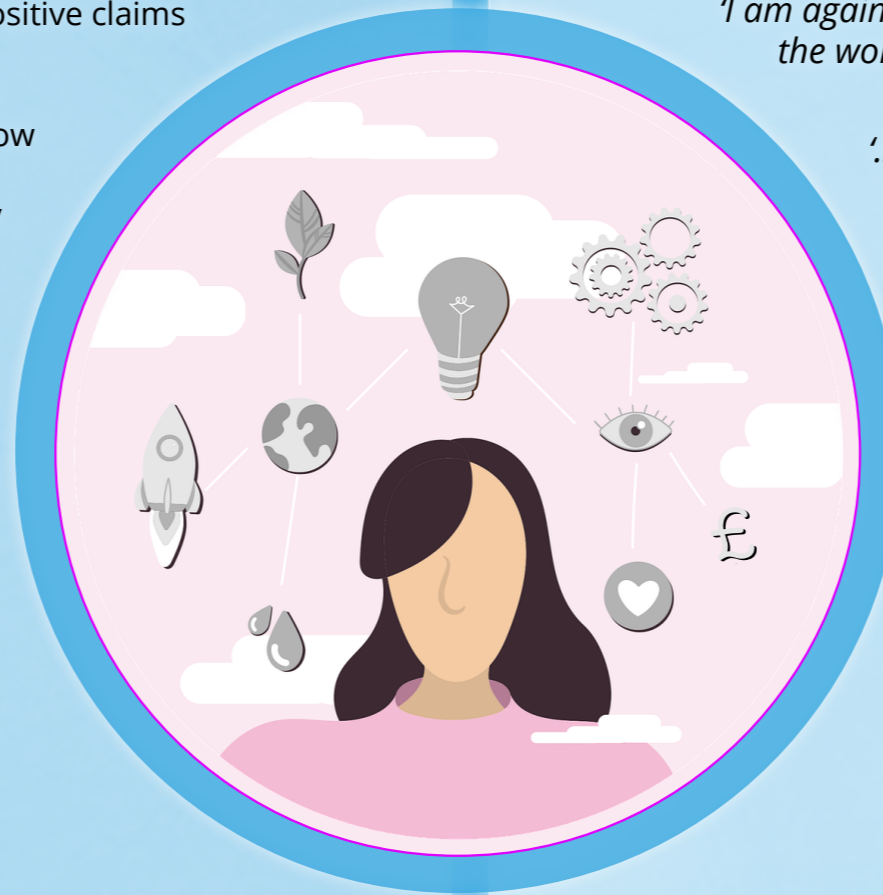
- Religious **apologism** – More vocal speakers appear in the media to defend religion and its doctrine.
 - William Lane Craig has debated some of the New Atheists and has founded the organisation Reasonable Faith to promote Christian belief. He has made use of social media to reach a wide audience.
 - Robert Barron is a Catholic priest who founded Word on Fire Ministries to promote the Catholic faith and is active on YouTube and TV. He claims that atheism is the fantasy not faith.

Key quotes

'I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world.' (Dawkins)

'... I am an antitheist; ...I hold that the influence of churches, and the effect of religious belief, is positively harmful.' (Hitchens)

'The question of whether science has limits is certainly not improper, nor does a positive answer... represent a lapse into some kind of superstition.' (McGrath)



Key words

atheos	atheism	new atheism
agnosticism	antitheism	non-thinking
infantile	partially overlapping magisteria	anthropic fine tuning
inerrancy	intelligent design	apologism

Religious Responses to New Atheism

- Science and religion are compatible – Some refute the challenge that says that science and religion are in opposition to each other.
 - Alister and Joanna McGrath argue that religion and science are **partially overlapping magisteria** (POMA), the two areas of authority are concerned with the same issues and can benefit each other.
 - John Polkinghorne argues that physics is only part of what it takes to understand the universe. Science cannot explain value and meaning in the universe.
- Fundamentalist activity – Some religious groups worry society is threatened by New Atheism and seek to defend it.
 - The Christian Right in the USA work to influence voters on issues such as homosexuality, abortion and climate change. In the UK, The Christian Institute campaigns on similar issues based on the **inerrancy** of scripture.
 - US campaign called Teach the Controversy calls for **Intelligent Design** (Some parts of the universe were made by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process) to be taught in science classes as an equal and alternative theory.

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

- Whether religion is dangerous, harmless, or helpful
- Whether religion should be eradicated from society
- Whether science and religion are in opposition to each other

Key questions

- Can someone accept scientific findings and be religious as well?
- Is it reasonable to ask whether science has limits to what it can discover?
- Is it wrong to teach young people about religious belief?