

# The Future of Belief

## The Importance of Religion in the Modern World

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### I. Part One: Crisis of Meaning

[A] Richard Dawkins: his attack on the “God hypothesis” (*The God Delusion*, 2006 ).

[B] Herbert McCabe: ‘when we invoke God we don’t clear up a puzzle, we draw attention to a mystery.’ *God and Evil in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* (1954).

[C] Brian Leiter: the ‘naturalistic revolution’ in philosophy – the rise of a science-inspired model according to which philosophy should ‘either ... adopt and emulate the method of successful sciences, or ... operate in tandem with the sciences, as their abstract and reflective branch.’ (*The Future for Philosophy*, 2004)

[D] Evan Thompson: ‘assemblies of neurons make sense of stimulation by constructing meaning, and this ... arises as a function of how the brain’s endogenous and nonlinear activity compensates for sensory perturbations.’ *Mind in Life* (2007).

[E] René Descartes: “The search for final causes [purposes] is utterly useless in physics.’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641).

[F] Daniel Dennett: Darwinism is the ‘universal acid’: it will eat through ‘just about every traditional topic ... ethics, art, culture, religion, humor, and yes, even consciousness ...’ (*Intuition Pumps*, 2013)

[G] Thomas Nagel: the current scientific consensus has trouble explaining ‘not only the emergence from a lifeless universe of reproducing organisms and their development by evolution to a greater and greater functional complexity; not only the consciousness of some of those organisms and its central role in their lives; but also the development of consciousness into an *instrument of transcendence* that can grasp objective reality and objective value”. Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (2012)

[H] Brian Cox: ‘far from being some chance event ... the emergence of life might have been an inevitable consequence of the laws of physics.’ *The Wonders of Life*.

[J] “There are two ways of being in the world, both of which are essential. One is to allow things to be present to us in all their embodied particularity, with all their changeability and impermanence and their interconnectedness, as part of a whole which is forever in flux. In this world we, too, feel connected to what we experience, part of that whole, not confined in subjective isolation from a world that is viewed as objective. The other is to step outside the flow of experience and ‘experience’ our experience in a special way: to re-present the world in a form that is less truthful, but apparently clearer, and therefore cast in a form which is more useful for manipulation of the world and one another. This world is explicitly abstracted, compartmentalised, fragmented ... essentially lifeless. From this world we feel detached, but in relation to it we are powerful.’ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 2009.

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### Part Two: The New Spirituality

[K] 'Our caresses, our tender words, our still rapture under the influence of Autumn sunsets, or pillared vistas, or calm majestic statues, or Beethoven symphonies, all bring with them the consciousness that they are mere waves and ripples in an unfathomable ocean of love and beauty; our emotion in its keenest moment passes from expression into silence, our love at its highest flood rushes beyond its object and loses itself in the sense of divine mystery.'

George Eliot, *Adam Bede* [1859].

[L] 'I'm a materialist ... yet there is something beyond the material, or not entirely consistent with it, what you could call the Numinous, the Transcendent ... It's in certain music, landscape, certain creative work, and without this we really would merely be primates. It's important to appreciate ... that, and religion has done a very good job of enshrining it in music and architecture.'

Christopher Hitchens, in debate with Tony Blair [2010].

[M]

music heard so deeply ... thought and action

see T. S. Eliot, 'The Dry Salvages' [1941], part V; in *Four Quartets*.

[N] '... the soaring quality of transcendence .... It is for art to capture that experience, to offer it to, in the case of literature, its readers; to be, for a secular, materialist culture, some sort of replacement for what the love of god offers in the world of faith.'

Salmon Rushdie, 'Is Nothing Sacred?' (1991)

[O] The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness: the Lord shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare: and in his temple all cry "Glory!"

Psalm 29 [28]: 8-9

[P] The wretchedness of human beings, but also their happiness if they would but turn towards the good: *Misère de l'homme sans Dieu . . . Félicité de l'homme avec Dieu*.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* [1670],

#### Further Reading

John Cottingham,

*How to Believe* (London, Bloomsbury, 2015);

*Philosophy of Religion Towards a More Humane Approach* (Cambridge University Press, 2014);

*Why Believe* (London: Continuum, 2009).

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