

Refuting New Atheism: A Critical Response to Richard Dawkins and Its Negative Impacts on Korean Society with Proposed Solutions

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Abstract

*This article critically examines the ideology of New Atheism, with particular focus on the writings and influence of Richard Dawkins. New Atheism, which rose to prominence in the West after the events of September 11, 2001, challenges religious belief through aggressive rationalism and popular science. Richard Dawkins, a key figure, is best known for *The God Delusion*, which has sparked wide global debate. This study explores the impact of New Atheism on Korean society, highlighting its moral and social implications, including the normalization of incest, bestiality, child exploitation, and abortion. Methodologically, this study applies inductive, critical-analytical, historical, and statistical approaches to refute atheistic claims and to promote Islamic theological responses. The research addresses four central questions: the origins and spread of New Atheism, the arguments used by its proponents, the rational proofs for the existence of God, and effective strategies to mitigate its influence. The study concludes that collaborative efforts among scholars, institutions, and society are vital in countering the spread of atheism and guiding youth toward faith and moral clarity.*

Keywords: *New Atheism, Richard Dawkins, Atheism in Korea, Islamic Theology, Moral Crisis.*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji secara kritis ideologi Atheisme Baru, dengan fokus khusus pada tulisan dan pengaruh Richard Dawkins. Atheisme Baru muncul di Barat pasca peristiwa 11 September 2001, dan menyerang keyakinan agama melalui rasionalisme agresif dan sains populer. Richard Dawkins, tokoh sentral dalam gerakan ini, dikenal lewat karyanya "The God Delusion" yang memicu perdebatan global. Penelitian ini mengamati dampak Atheisme Baru terhadap masyarakat Korea, termasuk normalisasi inses, hubungan seksual dengan hewan, eksploitasi anak, dan aborsi. Metode dalam penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan induktif, analitik-kritis, historis, dan statistik untuk membantah klaim ateistik dan menyampaikan tanggapan teologis Islam. Penelitian ini menjawab empat pertanyaan utama, yaitu asal-usul dan penyebaran Atheisme Baru, argumen para penganutnya, bukti rasional keberadaan Tuhan, dan strategi efektif untuk menanggulangi pengaruhnya. Hasil penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa upaya kolektif antara para cendekiawan, lembaga, dan masyarakat sangat penting dalam membendung perluasan ateisme serta membimbing generasi muda menuju keimanan dan moralitas.

Kata Kunci: *Atheisme Baru, Richard Dawkins, Atheisme di Korea, Teologi Islam, Krisis Moral.*

Introduction

The rise of New Atheism marks a significant development in contemporary ideological discourse. Emerging predominantly in the early 21st century, it gained momentum following the events of September 11, 2001, which served as a catalyst for critiques against religion, particularly within Western societies.¹ Prominent figures such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett sought to redefine the atheistic narrative by openly challenging religious beliefs in public spheres.² This movement differs from classical atheism in its method and mission it is not content with merely rejecting belief in God, but seeks to eradicate religious influence from public life.³ Thus, New Atheism represents

¹ Harris, Sam, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2005).

² Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006).

³ Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, vol. 14 (Penguin, 2006).

a militant and activist form of unbelief that aims not only to deny the existence of God but also to eliminate religion's presence from the public sphere.

Central to this intellectual movement is Richard Dawkins, a British evolutionary biologist whose book *The God Delusion* (2006) became a manifesto for New Atheists worldwide.⁴ In it, Dawkins argues that belief in God is not only unjustified but dangerous, proposing that religion is a primary cause of violence, irrationality, and division.⁵ He relies heavily on Darwinian evolution and materialist philosophy to support his arguments, contending that science has rendered religious belief obsolete. This combative style of argumentation attracted global attention, elevating New Atheism from a fringe discourse into a dominant cultural trend in secular societies. In contrast to traditional skepticism, New Atheism does not merely question religion; it actively campaigns against its presence in education, politics, and culture.⁶ This ideological aggressiveness has amplified its appeal among secular youth, especially in technologically advanced and rapidly modernizing societies.⁷

While the movement originated in the West, its influence has extended into non-Western contexts, including South Korea.⁸ As one of the most technologically advanced and globalized nations in Asia, Korea has witnessed a growing trend of secularization,

⁴ Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. (Grand Central Publishing, 2009).

⁵ Thomas Zenk, *New Atheism* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 245–60, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199644650.013.034>.

⁶ Stephen S. Bullivant, 'The New Atheism And Sociology: Why Here? Why Now? What Next?', in *Religion and the New Atheism A Critical Appraisal* (BRILL, 2010), 109–24, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004185579.i-253>.

⁷ Meehyun Chung, 'Protestant Theology in Korea', in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Wolfe N. Brendan (University of St Andrews, 1 February 2024), <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/ProtestantTheologyinKorea>.

⁸ Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, vol. 14 (Penguin, 2006).

particularly among younger generations.⁹ The anti-religious rhetoric of Dawkins and other New Atheists resonates with segments of Korean society that increasingly equate religion with irrationality and outdated traditions.¹⁰ However, this has also produced negative consequences: heightened polarization between believers and non-believers,¹¹ the erosion of religious contributions to education and social welfare,¹² and a narrowing of public discourse that frames religion solely as a source of conflict rather than a moral and cultural resource.¹³

Critics contend that Dawkins' reductionist approach distorts the complexity of religious traditions, conflates extremism with faith in general, and overlooks the ethical, communal, and philosophical dimensions of religion.¹⁴ In the Korean context, such views risk undermining the historical role that religion has played in democratization, social justice movements, and the cultivation of communal values. Left unchallenged, the spread of New Atheism in Korea may further fragment social cohesion and diminish the moral capital needed for addressing pressing national issues.

This article, therefore, seeks to critically refute the claims of Richard Dawkins and the broader New Atheist movement while analyzing their negative implications for Korean society. By examining the epistemological flaws of Dawkins' arguments,

⁹ Sung Gun Kim, 'Secularization in Korea: From Religious Growth to Stagnation', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 58, no. 2 (2019): 377–395.

¹⁰ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*.

¹¹ Jibum Kim et al., 'Trends of Religious Identification in Korea: Changes and Continuities', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, no. 4 (2009): 789–93, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2009.01480.x>.

¹² Ha-cheong Yeon, 'Social Welfare Policies in the Republic of Korea', *International Social Security Review* 39, no. 2 (1986): 153–63, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-246X.1986.tb00626.x>.

¹³ Grace Davie, *Religion in Public Life: Levelling the Ground*, with Peter Hennessy (Theos, 2017).

¹⁴ Gábor Itzész, 'The Undesirability of Religion and the Improbability of God's Existence: A Review Essay', *European Journal of Mental Health* 2, no. 2 (2007): 237–66, <https://doi.org/10.1556/EJMH.2.2007.2.6>.

situating them within the Korean sociocultural context, and proposing constructive solutions, this study aims to provide an intellectual response that balances the insights of science with the enduring value of religion. Ultimately, it argues for a more integrative framework in which science and religion are not seen as adversaries but as complementary resources for human flourishing and social harmony.

This study aims to examine the ideological roots and sociocultural consequences of New Atheism, with a specific focus on its impact in South Korea. It seeks to formulate responses based on Islamic theology that engage both intellectually and socially with atheistic arguments.¹⁵ The research is guided by four key questions: the origins and intellectual foundations of New Atheism; its impact on Korean society's religious and ethical landscape; the rational and theological proofs for the existence of God in Islam; and the most effective strategies for countering atheistic influence in Korea.¹⁶ To address these questions, the study employs a combination of qualitative methodologies, including historical analysis of atheism's philosophical development and diffusion, textual analysis of Richard Dawkins' arguments, theological interpretation of Islamic doctrinal principles, and sociological data analysis regarding religious trends in South Korea.¹⁷ By integrating these methods, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of the ideological and cultural dynamics surrounding New Atheism, while offering scholarly tools for religious institutions, educators, and policymakers to respond to the ongoing secular shift with intellectual rigor and theological depth.

¹⁵ Bullivant, "The New Atheism And Sociology: Why Here? Why Now? What Next?", 109–24.

¹⁶ Bullivant, "The New Atheism And Sociology: Why Here? Why Now? What Next?", 109–24.

¹⁷ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 368–72.

New Atheism: A Media-Savvy Ideology

The emergence of New Atheism in the early twenty-first century represents more than a continuation of classical atheistic thought; it is a consciously orchestrated cultural movement. Unlike earlier atheistic philosophies that often remained confined to the academy represented by figures such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell, or Jean-Paul Sartre, New Atheism is deliberately populist in its approach. Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett, often dubbed the “Four Horsemen,” not only sought to critique religious belief but also to recast it as an existential threat to human progress. Their central claim is not merely that God does not exist, but that belief in God is harmful to society, perpetuating violence, superstition, and intellectual stagnation.¹⁸

This rhetorical shift is critical. Whereas Enlightenment-era critiques of religion emphasized rational autonomy and freedom from clerical authority, New Atheism weaponizes modern communication tools: bestselling books, televised debates, podcasts, YouTube channels, and university platforms to aggressively popularize atheistic ideas.¹⁹ Dawkins’ *The God Delusion* sold millions of copies worldwide and was translated into over thirty languages,²⁰ ensuring its influence extended far beyond academic philosophy departments. Similarly, Hitchens’ *God Is Not Great* framed religion as “poisoning everything,” using journalistic flair and polemical wit to reach audiences that might never pick up a dense philosophical treatise.²¹

The movement is further distinguished by its post-9/11 context. New Atheist rhetoric flourished in an atmosphere of fear and suspicion toward religion, particularly Islam, which was

¹⁸ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*.

¹⁹ Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*.

²⁰ Harris, Sam, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*.

²¹ Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, vol. 14.

increasingly portrayed in Western media as violent and regressive.²² Sam Harris' writings explicitly argued that religious moderation itself was dangerous, for it enabled extremism by legitimizing faith.²³ This sweeping indictment of religion resonated with audiences disillusioned by religious wars, clerical abuse scandals, and rising global fundamentalism. Thus, New Atheism became not merely a set of intellectual claims, but a cultural crusade aimed at reshaping public consciousness.²⁴

However, this same populist approach also weakens New Atheism's intellectual foundation. Its claims often rely on rhetorical flourishes rather than sustained philosophical argumentation. Critics such as John Gray, Terry Eagleton, and Alister McGrath have noted that the Four Horsemen recycle old arguments in new packaging while ignoring centuries of sophisticated theological engagement with the very issues they raise.²⁵ In this respect, New Atheism is less a revolution of thought than a media phenomenon: a brand of skepticism designed for mass consumption rather than rigorous philosophical scrutiny.

In the context of South Korea, where rapid modernization and secularization have created both technological advancement and spiritual dislocation, the New Atheist narrative carries particular relevance. While Korea is not traditionally Christian or Muslim in majority, it is highly susceptible to cultural imports from the West, including secularist and atheist ideologies.²⁶ As young Koreans increasingly consume global media, the subtle influence of New

²² Stuart McAnulla, 'Secular Fundamentalists? Characterising the New Atheist Approach to Secularism, Religion and Politics', *British Politics* 9, no. 2 (2014): 641–658, <https://doi.org/10.1057/bp.2013.27>.

²³ John Gray, *Seven Types of Atheism* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).

²⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

²⁵ Alister McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

²⁶ Dawn Moore, *The New Atheists: The Twilight of Reason and the War on Religion* (New York: Wiley, 2010).

Atheist rhetoric often embedded in entertainment, popular science, and academic discourse cannot be underestimated. The danger lies not only in the rejection of religion but in the replacement of spiritual frameworks with an aggressive scientistic materialism that fails to address deeper human needs.

Deconstructing the Core Tenets: Scientism and Morality

At the heart of New Atheism lies a commitment to scientism—the belief that empirical science is the only reliable path to knowledge. Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* famously equates belief in God with belief in a “flying spaghetti monster,” a rhetorical strategy that seeks to reduce faith to superstition, devoid of rational justification.²⁷ For Dawkins and his counterparts, Darwinian evolution provides sufficient explanation for the diversity and complexity of life, eliminating the need for a divine designer.²⁸ This reliance on natural selection and evolutionary biology is extended into a philosophical naturalism: the conviction that reality consists exclusively of material processes subject to empirical investigation.

However, this reduction of all knowledge to empirical science is deeply problematic. *First*, it collapses into self-refutation: the claim “only empirical knowledge is valid” cannot itself be verified empirically, but is a philosophical assertion. As Alvin Plantinga has argued, scientism undermines itself because it cannot justify its own epistemological foundations without appealing to non-empirical reasoning.²⁹ Similarly, Charles Taylor critiques the “immanent

²⁷ Yongki Sutoyo and Fasya Tharra Annada, ‘The Problem of the Human Concept in Neo-Darwinism: A Critique of Richard Dawkins’ Thought’, *Tasfiah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 8, no. 1 (2024): 1–32, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tasfiah.v8i1.11180>.

²⁸ Andrew E. Kim, ‘Korean Religious Culture and Its Affinity to Christianity: The Rise of Protestant Christianity in South Korea’, *Sociology of Religion* 61, no. 2 (2000): 23–45, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3712281>.

²⁹ Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

frame” of modern secularism, in which all transcendence is excluded a priori, noting that such a stance is not neutral but itself a faith-position about reality.³⁰ Thus, New Atheism’s appeal to science is not merely scientific but also metaphysical—and therefore open to critique.

Second, scientism ignores the limits of empirical inquiry. Science, by its very method, deals with measurable phenomena within the natural world. It can describe how things occur but cannot explain why they exist in the first place. Questions of ultimate causality, meaning, and morality transcend the scope of the scientific method. As John Polkinghorne notes, physics may explain the mechanisms of the universe, but it cannot answer why there is a universe at all rather than nothing.³¹ Such questions belong to philosophy and theology, not empirical measurement.

In the same hand, one of the central claims of New Atheism is that morality can be fully *explained without reference to religion*. *Dawkins and others argue that* ethical behavior is an evolutionary byproduct: altruism, cooperation, and fairness arose because they enhanced survival and reproduction within early human communities³². On this view, morality is neither absolute nor divinely ordained, but contingent upon biological and social advantage. Harris goes even further, claiming in *The Moral Landscape* that science can determine human values by grounding them in the flourishing of conscious creatures³³. This attempt to construct morality on a purely naturalistic foundation has intuitive appeal in secular societies, yet it suffers from significant philosophical weaknesses.

³⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

³¹ John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

³² Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

³³ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Al-Mustasfā Min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1904).

First, evolutionary accounts of morality are subject to the problem of reductionism. If moral norms are nothing more than adaptive strategies, then their binding authority dissolves when survival no longer requires them. As Michael Ruse and E. O. Wilson candidly admitted, morality under such a framework is an “illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate”³⁴. Such relativism is unstable: if notions of justice or human dignity are merely genetic accidents, there is no rational basis to condemn atrocities like genocide or slavery once they become evolutionarily advantageous.

Second, history demonstrates the dangers of grounding morality in evolutionary naturalism. Social Darwinism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries justified colonialism, eugenics, and racial hierarchies under the guise of “survival of the fittest”³⁵. Nazi ideology, while not reducible to Darwinism, exploited similar notions of racial struggle and biological destiny to legitimate mass extermination. These examples illustrate the peril of divorcing morality from transcendent standards and reducing it to the contingencies of biology or culture.

The Korean Context: Reception and Social Impact

Although New Atheism originated in the West, its ideas have rapidly permeated global societies, including South Korea. As a country that has undergone rapid modernization, technological advancement, and educational reform, Korea has seen a shift in worldview among its younger generations. Influenced by Western media, online discourse, and scientific rationalism, a significant portion of Korean youth are now embracing secular and atheistic ideologies.

³⁴ Abu Ishaq Al-Shatibi, *Al-Muwāfaqāt Fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'a* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997).

³⁵ Seok-Choon Lew et al., ‘Confucian Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism in Korea: The Significance of Filial Piety’, *Journal of East Asian Studies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 171–96, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1598240800007153>.

South Korea's encounter with modernity has involved dramatic economic transformation, democratization, and global integration. With these changes, societal values have shifted from collectivism and spiritual cohesion to individualism and materialism. Religion, once central to community identity, is increasingly regarded as irrelevant or oppressive.³⁶

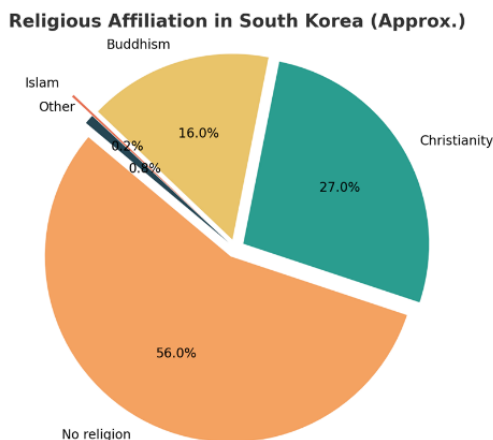


Figure. 1. Religious Affiliation in South Korea

As shown in Figure 1, more than half of the South Korean population identifies as non-religious. The Korean education system, which emphasizes scientific achievement and economic productivity, provides little space for theological or moral education.³⁷ This vacuum has been filled by ideologies like New Atheism that promote empirical rationalism as the sole source of truth. Among university students and young professionals, skepticism towards religion is increasingly normalized.

In tandem with this trend is the erosion of traditional values and family structures, and a growing moral ambiguity, which can be

³⁶ Cho, *The Routledge Companion to Korean Literature*.

³⁷ Gwang Ok and Ka-Ram Lee, 'The Rise of Modern Sport and the Olympic Movement in Korea', in *The Routledge Handbook of Sport in Asia*, 1st edn (British: Routledge, 2020), 159–68.

partially attributed to the rejection of metaphysical and theological frameworks that once grounded societal norms. Public discourse increasingly reflects these changes: debates on euthanasia, abortion, and gender identity are shaped by secular paradigms that prioritize autonomy over transcendental ethics.³⁸

The spread of New Atheism in Korea is not merely an abstract philosophical trend it carries profound social consequences. The rejection of divine accountability and moral absolutes paves the way for ethical relativism, where individuals determine right and wrong based on personal or societal consensus.³⁹ This moral fluidity has led to increased tolerance or justification for behaviors previously regarded as deviant or immoral, such as incest, bestiality, and the dehumanization of unborn children in pro-abortion argument.⁴⁰

Without a transcendent source of moral authority, ethical boundaries become negotiable and vulnerable to the pressures of popular culture or utilitarian logic. The weakening of communal moral standards is evident in the normalization of pornography, increased mental health issues among youth, and declining marriage rates. In such an environment, existential anxiety and depression rise, as individuals lack a stable philosophical foundation upon which to build meaning in life.

The New Atheist movement, while claiming to champion rationalism and science, fails to offer a coherent foundation for moral objectivity or human dignity.⁴¹ Instead, it reduces morality to evolutionary advantage and social contract, which lack binding authority. Furthermore, Dawkins' argument that religion is a form of child abuse a theme he develops by criticizing religious

³⁸ David J. Nemeth, *The Architecture of Ideology: Neo-Confucian Imprinting on Cheju Island, Korea* (London: University of California Press, 1987).

³⁹ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, 'Religion in the Postmodern Thought', *Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies* 2, no. 1 (2024): 67–81, <https://doi.org/10.21111/jios.v2i1.41>.

⁴⁰ Diana Yuksel, 'Korean Confucian Moral Self-Accomplishment and Postmodern Ethics', *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai - Philologia* 58, no. 1 (2013): 173–84.

⁴¹ Harris, Sam, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*.

education and rites of passage has found disturbing echoes in Korean digital spaces where anti-religious rhetoric is widespread. Social media platforms have become breeding grounds for the ridicule of religious figures and sacred texts, reinforcing a climate of hostility toward belief.⁴²

Islamic Epistemology and Rational Theology

In contrast to the self-refuting epistemology of scientism deconstructed above, the Islamic intellectual tradition offers a more robust and integrated framework for knowledge. Islamic intellectual tradition acknowledges the value of empirical investigation but situates it within a broader tripartite epistemology: *ḥiss* (sense perception), *'aql* (reason), and *wahy* (revelation).⁴³ Each of these plays a complementary role in human knowledge. Sense perception allows observation of the physical world; reason organizes, interprets, and infers; and revelation provides access to truths inaccessible to human senses and reason alone, such as the existence of the afterlife, the nature of the soul, and divine will. Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi emphasizes that empiricism, while powerful, is inherently limited to the material and observable.⁴⁴ To absolutize it as Dawkins does is to exclude vast domains of human experience, including metaphysical truths, ethical absolutes, and aesthetic judgments. The Qur'ān itself repeatedly urges humanity to reflect upon nature as signs (*āyāt*) pointing to God (Q. 3:190–191), affirming the legitimacy of empirical observation but integrating it into a teleological vision that affirms divine unity (*tawḥīd*). Thus, rather than a conflict, Islam posits a harmony between reason, observation, and revelation.

⁴² Dawkins, *The God Delusion*.

⁴³ Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1998); Usmanul Khakim, 'Syed Muhammad Naquib Al Attas' Theory of Islamic Worldview and Its Significance on His Conception of Islamization of Present-Day Knowledge' (Thesis, University of Darussalam Gontor, 2020).

⁴⁴ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *Islamic Epistemology: An Introduction* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2011).

The accusation that religion is irrational is one of New Atheism's strongest claims. Yet, Islamic intellectual history tells a different story. The 'ilm al-kalām tradition, developed by scholars such as al-Ash'arī and al-Māturīdī, systematically engaged with Greek philosophy, logic, and metaphysics to defend the faith against skepticism. These theologians did not reject reason but placed it within the framework of divine revelation. Modern scholars such as Zarkasyi continue this tradition by engaging with contemporary challenges posed by atheism and materialism.¹¹ Rational proofs for God's existence—such as the ḥudūth (contingency) argument and the teleological argument—remain valid and are increasingly supported by discoveries in cosmology and physics that point to fine-tuning in the universe¹⁵. These arguments bridge faith and reason, refuting the false dichotomy imposed by Dawkins and others.

An Islamic Worldview: Cosmology, Anthropology, and Ethics

Beyond epistemology, the Islamic worldview also provides compelling answers to the cosmological and ethical questions that New Atheism fails to adequately address. Modern science, far from eliminating the need for God, increasingly raises questions that suggest the inadequacy of a purely materialistic worldview.⁴⁵ The Big Bang theory, now widely accepted in cosmology, points to a definite beginning of the universe approximately 13.8 billion years ago. This undermines the materialist assumption of an eternal universe and resonates with classical Islamic cosmological arguments (dalīl al-ḥudūth), which argue that everything that begins to exist requires a cause.⁴⁶ As William Lane Craig has argued in his development of the kalām cosmological argument, the finite

⁴⁵ Usmanul Khakim et al., 'God and Worldview According to Al-Attas and Wall', *Tsaqafah* 16, no. 2 (2020).

⁴⁶ Fakhruddin Al-Razi, *Al-Maṭālib al-'Āliya* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987).

nature of the universe points compellingly to the necessity of a transcendent cause beyond space and time.⁴⁷ In addition, the fine-tuning of the universe presents further difficulties for atheistic naturalism. The precise calibration of physical constants such as the strength of gravity, the cosmological constant, and the electromagnetic force creates conditions uniquely suited for life. Even slight variations in these constants would render the universe inhospitable.⁴⁸ While Dawkins dismisses this as a matter of chance or multiverse speculation⁴⁹ such responses remain speculative and untestable. By contrast, Islamic theology interprets this fine-tuning as a manifestation of divine wisdom (hikmah) and purposeful design, consistent with the Qur'ānic affirmation that God created the heavens and the earth “in due proportion” (Q. 54:49).

Dawkins' reliance on Darwinian evolution as a comprehensive explanation for life further illustrates the overextension of scientific theory into metaphysics. Evolutionary biology may explain mechanisms of adaptation, but it cannot account for the origin of life itself, nor can it adequately explain human consciousness, intentionality, or moral awareness. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr has noted, the human being in Islamic thought is not reducible to biological processes but possesses a spiritual dimension (rūḥ) that transcends material explanation.⁵⁰ Al-Ghazālī similarly warned against the error of reducing all causation to mechanistic necessity, emphasizing that natural laws themselves are sustained by God's ongoing will.⁵¹ Moreover, evolutionary accounts of morality, often

⁴⁷ William Lane Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000).

⁴⁸ Paul Davies, *The Goldilocks Enigma: Why Is the Universe Just Right for Life?* (London: Penguin, 2006).

⁴⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 1997).

⁵⁰ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Tabāfut Al-Falāsifa [The Incoherence of the Philosophers]*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2000).

⁵¹ Michael Ruse and Edward O Wilson, ‘The Evolution of Ethics’, *New Scientist*, no. 1486 (1985): 50–52.

invoked by New Atheists, cannot escape relativism. If ethics are merely the product of genetic survival strategies, then notions of justice, compassion, or human dignity have no objective grounding. This stands in sharp contrast to Islamic moral epistemology, where ethical truths are rooted in the divine will and articulated through revelation. Thus, while Islam does not reject evolutionary science as a biological theory, it resists the philosophical naturalism that Dawkins attaches to it.

In contrast, Islamic ethics rests upon a transcendent foundation: the immutable will of God. The Qur'ān repeatedly emphasizes that good and evil are objective realities rooted in divine wisdom, not human invention. For instance, “Indeed, Allah commands justice, excellence, and giving to relatives, and forbids immorality, bad conduct, and oppression” (Q. 16:90). The divine command ensures that moral truths are not subject to fluctuation based on survival pressures or cultural whims. The framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'a* (higher objectives of Islamic law) illustrates this transcendence in a rationally accessible way. Developed by classical jurists such as al-Ghazālī and al-Shāṭibī, the *maqāṣid* articulate five overarching values: the preservation of faith (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), and wealth (*ḥifẓ al-māl*).⁵² These objectives provide a coherent framework for social justice, human rights, and communal harmony. Unlike the secular relativism of New Atheism, they anchor moral life in the divine order while allowing contextual application across different cultures and times.

Islamic thought offers a robust framework to counter the assumptions and implications of New Atheism. Rooted in both revelation and reason, Islamic theology (*'aqīdah*) affirms the compatibility between rational inquiry and belief in the unseen. The Qur'an consistently appeals to human reason while also

⁵² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974).

emphasizing the limitations of material knowledge.⁵³ Unlike New Atheism, Islam does not require the abandonment of empirical science but situates it within a broader metaphysical and ethical framework. The tradition of *'ilm al-kalām* (Islamic theological dialectics) developed sophisticated arguments for the existence of God, including cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments.⁵⁴

Contemporary scholars like Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi have built upon these classical foundations to address modern secular ideologies.⁵⁵ The design and interdependence found in nature such as the highly complex behavior of fungi like *Cordyceps* serve as signs (*āyāt*) pointing toward divine wisdom and intentionality, contradicting the random, purposeless model proposed by atheistic naturalism. Islam also offers a compelling ethical framework that addresses the moral vacuum left by atheism. Through the concept of *maqāṣid al-ṣyārī'ah* (higher objectives of Islamic law), Muslim scholars articulate a vision of ethics that promotes human dignity, social justice, and spiritual fulfillment.⁵⁶ This vision stands in stark contrast to utilitarian or relativist ethics that prioritize pleasure and power over moral integrity. By grounding human rights and social responsibilities in the divine will, Islam secures an objective moral order rooted in the sacred.⁵⁷

⁵³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Muzaffar Iqbal, *Islam, Science, Muslims, and Technology* (Kuala Lumpur: Al-Qalam Pub., 2007).

⁵⁴ Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁵⁵ Zarkasyi, 'Religion in the Postmodern Thought'.

⁵⁶ Usmanul Khakim et al., 'Formulating an Islamic Corporate Social Responsibility (I-CSR) Model: Integrating Maqāṣid Sharī'ah and Iḥsān', *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 14, no. 2 (2024): 263–85.

⁵⁷ Cafer S. Yaran, *Islamic Thought on the Existence of God: With Contributions from Contemporary Western Philosophy of Religion*, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, v. 16 (Washington, D.C: Council For Research In Values and Philosophy, 2003).

Synthesis and Solutions: Addressing the Korean Crisis

The moral instability fostered by secular relativism is especially visible in contemporary South Korea. While the nation has achieved remarkable economic progress, it faces a growing crisis of identity and ethics, particularly among its youth. Rising rates of cyberbullying, academic dishonesty, and corruption scandals reveal a society where moral boundaries are increasingly negotiable.⁵⁸ The absence of a transcendent reference point has left many young people vulnerable to existential despair, reflected in South Korea's high suicide rates and mental health struggles. In this context, New Atheist proposals that morality can rest solely on biology or secular consensus appear not only inadequate but dangerously shallow. By contrast, the Islamic ethical tradition offers a framework that integrates individual responsibility, communal solidarity, and divine accountability. The concept of *taqwā* (God-consciousness) ensures that morality is not merely external compliance but an inner awareness of God's presence guiding ethical behavior. Furthermore, the emphasis on accountability in the afterlife provides an enduring motivation for justice that transcends temporal advantage.

While New Atheism dismisses religion as an obstacle to progress, it fails to provide an adequate replacement for the existential role religion plays in human life. At its core, religion offers a narrative of purpose, hope, and accountability that anchors individuals within a larger cosmic framework. When this framework is stripped away, as Nietzsche foresaw in his proclamation of the "death of God," societies face a vacuum of meaning that can give rise to nihilism and despair.⁵⁹ New Atheism intensifies this crisis by dismantling belief systems without constructing a viable alternative.

⁵⁸ 'Suicide Rates (Indicator)', *Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)*, 2023, <https://data.oecd.org/healthstat/suicide-rates.htm>.

⁵⁹ Kyu-Seok Cheong et al., 'Suicide Rate Differences by Sex, Age, and Urbanicity, and Related Regional Factors in Korea', *Journal of Preventive Medicine & Public Health* 45, no. 2 (2012): 70–77, <https://doi.org/10.3961/jpmph.2012.45.2.70>.

Its promise of a purely naturalistic worldview reduces human existence to the blind mechanics of evolution and the indifferent vastness of the cosmos. The consequences of this vacuum are particularly stark in South Korea, where rapid modernization, industrialization, and digital hyper-connectivity have coincided with rising existential discontent.

South Korea consistently records one of the highest suicide rates among OECD nations, with suicide remaining the leading cause of death among young people.⁶⁰ Mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, are exacerbated by intense academic and professional pressures, family fragmentation, and social isolation in a highly competitive environment. These phenomena reflect a broader crisis of meaning: technological prosperity and material abundance coexist with deep spiritual alienation.

From a New Atheist perspective, appeals to transcendence are dismissed as illusion or superstition. Yet secular materialism has not proven capable of addressing the human longing for significance. As Viktor Frankl observed in his reflections on existential psychology, humans cannot survive on material satisfaction alone; they require a sense of ultimate purpose to sustain psychological well-being.⁶¹ The absence of such purpose is evident in Korea's "sampo generation" young adults who forgo marriage, family, and long-term goals, often citing hopelessness and lack of meaning in life. New Atheism's critique of religion may resonate intellectually, but existentially it leaves adherents vulnerable to despair.

Islamic theology offers a profound response to this crisis of meaning. Central to the Islamic worldview is the concept of *fitrah*—the innate disposition toward belief in God and moral awareness. As the Qur'ān declares: "*So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the fitrah of Allah upon which He*

⁶⁰ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

⁶¹ Shakaib U. Lassi and Hiroshi Koyanagi, 'Hikikomori: A Unique and Complex Challenge in Mental Health in Japan', *Asian Journal of Psychiatry* 22 (2016): 121–23.

has created people” (QS. 30:30). This teaching affirms that the human quest for meaning is not accidental but intrinsic to human nature. Alienation arises not because transcendence is an illusion, but because human beings suppress or ignore their fitrah under the pressures of materialism or secular ideologies.

Complementing this is the doctrine of *tawḥīd* (divine unity), which situates all existence within a coherent framework oriented toward God. *Tawḥīd* affirms that life is purposeful, guided by divine wisdom, and directed toward accountability in the Hereafter. This provides individuals with a sense of belonging that transcends cultural or national identity, grounding them in an eternal relationship with their Creator. For Korean society, where existential loneliness and purposelessness are widespread, these principles offer not only personal consolation but also a communal ethic of solidarity, hope, and transcendence.

Table 1: New Atheism Claim and Islamic Response

Theme	New Atheism Claim	Islamic Response
Epistemology	Only empirical science provides valid knowledge	Tripartite knowledge: sense (hiss), reason ('aql), and revelation (wahy)
Morality	Ethics are products of evolution and social cooperation	Ethics grounded in divine will
Meaning	Religion is an illusion; life is purposeless	Fitrah and tawhid provide inherent meaning and accountability
Rationality	Religion is irrational, anti-science	Kalam tradition: rational proofs

Table 1 provides a concise comparative framework outlining the core ideological conflicts between New Atheism and the Islamic theological response. It juxtaposes their opposing stances across four fundamental themes: epistemology, morality, meaning, and rationality. Against the New Atheist claim that only empirical

science constitutes valid knowledge, Islam offers a tripartite epistemology that integrates sense perception (*ḥiss*), reason (*‘aql*), and revelation (*wahy*). Where New Atheism reduces morality to a product of evolution and social cooperation, Islam anchors ethical truths in the immutable divine will, ensuring objectivity and transcendence. In response to the assertion that religion is an illusion and life is purposeless, Islam posits that the innate human disposition (*fitrah*) and the principle of divine unity (*tawḥīd*) provide inherent meaning and ultimate accountability. Finally, countering the charge that religion is irrational and anti-science, Islam points to its rich tradition of rational theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*), which employs logical proofs to demonstrate God’s existence and the coherence of faith. Thus, the table encapsulates a comprehensive Islamic rebuttal that challenges New Atheist presuppositions while affirming a integrated worldview that harmonizes faith, reason, and purpose.

The inadequacy of New Atheism in addressing meaning is not unique to Korea but part of a broader pattern in secular societies. In postwar Japan, similar crises manifested in phenomena such as hikikomori (extreme social withdrawal) and declining birth rates, reflecting deep existential fatigue in a society focused on productivity but detached from spiritual anchors.⁶² In Western Europe, Charles Taylor has documented the rise of an “age of authenticity,” where individuals search for personal fulfillment without transcendent reference, leading to fragility and dissatisfaction.⁶³ In each case, secular materialism creates conditions for prosperity but struggles to fulfill the deepest human need for significance.

Islam, by contrast, integrates meaning with moral responsibility. Life is not random but purposeful: trials are occasions for growth, worship is the central mode of existence, and death is not an end but a passage to eternal accountability. This framework equips

⁶² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 473–502.

⁶³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 473–502.

individuals to endure suffering with patience (ṣabr), embrace responsibility with integrity (amānah), and cultivate gratitude (shukr) even amidst hardship. In societies like Korea, where despair is widespread despite prosperity, such a vision offers a necessary antidote to the malaise of nihilism.

To effectively counter the influence of New Atheism, particularly in the Korean context, a comprehensive approach must be adopted that incorporates multiple strategies. Educational reform is critical; curriculum development should integrate religious and moral education alongside science, emphasizing harmony rather than conflict between the two. In the digital sphere, Islamic scholars and educators must harness platforms such as social media and online forums to present clear, rational, and engaging content that directly addresses common doubts and misconceptions. Moreover, public discourse must not be neglected—Muslim intellectuals should actively engage in interfaith dialogues and philosophical forums to share Islam's perspective on existential and ethical questions. Finally, youth empowerment is essential; programs designed to cultivate spiritual reflection, ethical leadership, and a sense of communal belonging are necessary to combat the loneliness, confusion, and purposelessness that often accompany atheistic ideologies.⁶⁴

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the intellectual foundations and cultural impact of New Atheism, particularly as articulated by Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett. The analysis revealed three key findings. First, New Atheism rests heavily on scientism, a self-refuting epistemology that reduces all knowledge to empirical science while neglecting its own philosophical assumptions. Second, its account of morality without God collapses into relativism, rendering ethical values contingent

⁶⁴ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*.

upon evolutionary expediency and therefore unstable. Third, while New Atheism dismantles traditional religious frameworks, it fails to offer a viable alternative for addressing the crisis of meaning in modern societies, including South Korea, where existential disorientation and moral fragmentation are widespread.

From these findings, the main conclusion emerges that Islamic theology provides a more comprehensive framework for integrating science, morality, and existential purpose. Through its epistemology (*hiss*, *'aql*, *wahy*), moral philosophy (*maqāsid al-shari'a*, *taqwā*), and metaphysical vision (*fitrah*, *tawhīd*), Islam not only addresses the philosophical shortcomings of New Atheism but also responds to the practical crises of modern secular societies.

Looking forward, future research should focus on contextual applications of Islamic theology in secularized societies such as Korea, exploring how *kalām* arguments, ethical frameworks, and spiritual practices can engage effectively with local intellectual traditions. Comparative studies between Islamic, Buddhist, and secular philosophies may also yield fruitful insights for interfaith dialogue and cultural adaptation. Moreover, empirical research into the reception of Islamic intellectual responses among Korean youth could provide valuable data on how religious thought can meaningfully address existential and moral crises in postmodern contexts.[]

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