

## About this book

This book is written for those without a lot of time for reading but who would like to see some short responses to key claims of what has, since 2006, been termed 'The New Atheism'.<sup>1</sup> So, what's new about it and how did it arise?

An answer to the first question will have to wait until the end of this book, but an answer to the second one was suggested by John Gray, formerly Professor of European Thought at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Having rejected both humanism and religion, he comments on the 'sudden explosion in the literature of proselytising atheism',<sup>2</sup> referring to Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, Christopher Hitchens' *God Is Not Great*, the writings of Daniel Dennett and others. Gray argues that 'The urgency with which they produce their anti-religious polemics suggests that... the tide of secularisation has turned' and that 'the result is the appearance of an evangelical type of atheism not seen since Victorian times'.<sup>3</sup> Readers must judge this provocative conclusion for themselves.

This short book is mainly concerned with the writings and broadcastings of Professor Dawkins, currently the most prolific advocate of atheism. But it also examines some of the claims of the other two authors named above. I shall do my best to be fair in my criticisms of the writings of these three authors and I undertake that, if I have misrepresented their views, I will try to rectify this in any subsequent editions. Page numbers of quotations from Dawkins'

and Visiting Professor Hitchens' above titles, and from Professor Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell*, follow the citations, thus:[26] and[R] from Dawkins' *Root of all Evil?* TV programmes.

Since I started writing this book, quite a number of volumes on the New Atheism have appeared, but with the exception of Professor Antony Flew's *There Is a God*,<sup>4</sup> I took the decision not to read them before I had written what I wanted to say. However, I still owe a huge debt to that 'invisible college' of colleagues who, for decades, have stimulated my own thinking.

### **About the subtitle: 'Ten arguments that don't hold water?'**

In an earlier philosophical work, Flew cautioned that it would not

... do to recognize that of a whole series of arguments each individually is defective, but then to urge that nevertheless in sum they comprise an impressive case... We have here to insist upon a sometimes tricky distinction: between, on the one hand, the valid principle of the accumulation of evidence, where every item has at least some weight in its own right; and, on the other hand, the Ten-leaky-buckets-Tactic, applied to arguments none of which hold water at all.<sup>5</sup>

I am not suggesting that such a tactic has been deliberately employed, but rather questioning whether any of the ten points examined holds water and contribute to an overarching argument for atheism. I have interpreted Flew's caution more broadly than applying it to **Arguments** alone, to

include cases where only **A**ssertions (claims to truth) seem involved without supporting arguments. At the start of each chapter I have indicated the points with which I disagree, labelling them A1–A10, to allow readers to decide for themselves whether 'A' for Argument or 'A' for Assertion turns out to be more appropriate. To constitute rational arguments, good reasons are needed, backed up by evidence for any assertions made.

In *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins says that, unless he indicates otherwise, he will 'have Christianity mostly in mind' as 'the version with which I happen to be most familiar'.<sup>[37]</sup> I shall follow his example and, when referring to God, I shall have the Judaeo-Christian concept of God in mind, although much of what I say will apply more widely. On matters of science, I hold the views of mainstream cosmology and biology.

Michael Poole  
*King's College London*