

# The Telegraph

## Richard Dawkins accused of cowardice for refusing to debate existence of God

Richard Dawkins has made his name as the scourge of organised religion who branded the Roman Catholic Church “evil” and once called the Pope “a leering old villain in a frock”.



Richard Dawkins Photo: REX FEATURES

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By [Tim Ross \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/tim-ross/\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/tim-ross/) , Religious Affairs Editor

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But he now stands accused of “cowardice” after refusing four invitations to debate the existence of God with a renowned Christian philosopher.

A war of words has broken out between the best selling author of *The God Delusion*, and his critics, who see his refusal to take on the American academic, William Lane Craig, as a “glaring” failure and a sign that he may be losing his nerve.

Prof Dawkins maintains that Prof Craig is not a figure worthy of his attention and has reportedly said that such a contest would “look good” on his opponent’s CV but not on his own.

An emeritus fellow of New College, Oxford, Prof Dawkins last year supported a plan to charge Pope Benedict XVI with crimes against humanity for his alleged involvement in the cover-up of sex abuse by Catholic priests.

Prof Craig is a research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology, in California, and the author of 30

books and hundreds of scholarly articles on Christianity.

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[British people fail to recognise common Bible phrases \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/8512100/British-people-fail-to-recognise-common-Bible-phrases.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/8512100/British-people-fail-to-recognise-common-Bible-phrases.html)

[Richard Dawkins planning to have Pope Benedict arrested \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/7578024/Richard-Dawkins-planning-to-have-Pope-Benedict-arrested-over-crimes-against-humanity.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/7578024/Richard-Dawkins-planning-to-have-Pope-Benedict-arrested-over-crimes-against-humanity.html)

[Richard Dawkins slams Scottish FA \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/competitions/scottish-premier/8171463/Leading-scientist-Richard-Dawkins-slams-Scottish-Football-Association-over-sacking-of-Hugh-Dallas.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/competitions/scottish-premier/8171463/Leading-scientist-Richard-Dawkins-slams-Scottish-Football-Association-over-sacking-of-Hugh-Dallas.html)

[Dawkins causes outcry after likening burka to bin liner \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/7936221/Richard-Dawkins-causes-outcry-after-likening-the-burka-to-a-bin-liner.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/7936221/Richard-Dawkins-causes-outcry-after-likening-the-burka-to-a-bin-liner.html)

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He has debated with leading thinkers including Daniel Dennett, A.C.Grayling, Christopher Hitchens, Lewis Wolpert and Sam Harris.

Prof Craig is due to visit Britain in October this year. Four invitations to take part in public debates were sent to Prof Dawkins from The British Humanist Association, The Cambridge Debating Union, the Oxford Christian Union and Premier Radio.

Prof Dawkins declined them all. He told The Daily Telegraph that he had recently debated Prof Craig, in a boxing ring, in Mexico, and claimed he was not impressed by his opponent. His critics say this event was a six-person discussion, not a rigorous debate, but Prof Dawkins disagrees.

“I have no intention of assisting Craig in his relentless drive for self-promotion,” he said.

Some of Prof Dawkins’s contemporaries are not impressed. Dr Daniel Came, a philosophy lecturer and fellow atheist, from Worcester College, Oxford, wrote to him urging him to reconsider his refusal to debate the existence of God with Prof Craig.

In a letter to Prof Dawkins, Dr Came said: “The absence of a debate with the foremost apologist for Christian theism is a glaring omission on your CV and is of course apt to be interpreted as cowardice on your part.

“I notice that, by contrast, you are happy to discuss theological matters with television and radio presenters and other intellectual heavyweights like Pastor Ted Haggard of the National Association of Evangelicals and Pastor Keenan Roberts of the Colorado Hell House.”

Prof Craig, however, remains willing to debate with Prof Dawkins. “I am keeping the opportunity open for him to

change his mind and debate with me in the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford” in October, he said.

Prof Craig will be using his UK tour to analyse *The God Delusion* and to present his own “strong rational grounds” for belief in God.

His tour will include a London conference on the defence of Christianity and a debate in Manchester with the atheist, Peter Atkins, Professor of Chemistry at Oxford University, on the existence of God.

Prof Dawkins made his name as an evolutionary biologist with his 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*.

He has gained world-wide attention for his outspoken criticism of organised religion, and argued that the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States showed that a harder line must be taken with believers.

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