

## Definitions of words used when arguing about the existence (or otherwise) of God and in the Creation-Evolution debate

*OED = From The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1970*

*RD = Richard Dawkins*

**ABSURD** (see preposterous) Out of harmony with reason or propriety; in mod. use plainly opposed to reason, and hence ridiculous, silly. *OED*

**AGNOSTIC** (see gnostic) One who holds that the existence of anything beyond material phenomena e.g. of a First Cause or noumena<sup>1</sup>, cannot be known. Lacking knowledge. Not possessing esoteric spiritual knowledge; lacking special knowledge of spiritual mysteries. *OED*

**ARGUE** To bring forward reasons in support of a proposition; to discuss; to reason; hence to raise objections, dispute; to discuss the pros and cons of; to examine controversially. *OED*

**APOLOGIST** One who defends by argument. *OED*

**APOSTASY** Abandonment or renunciation of one's religious faith or moral allegiance. The abandonment of principle. *OED*

**ASSENT** To give the concurrence of one's will; to agree to; to comply with. *OED*

**ATHEISM** (see deism and theism) Disbelief in or denial of, the existence of a god. Godlessness (practical atheism). *OED*

**ATHEIST** (see deist and theist) One who denies or disbelieves the existence of a god. *OED*

**BELIEF** The mental action, condition, or habit of trusting to or confiding in a person or thing; trust, confidence, faith (faith orig. fidelity, fealty). Trust in God; the virtue of faith. *OED*

**BELIEVE** To have confidence or faith in, and consequently rely on; to give credence to; to hold as true.

**BIOLOGY** The study of human life and character; The science of physical life, dealing with organised beings or animals or plants, their morphology, physiology, origin and distribution. *OED*

**BLASPHEMY** Profane speaking of God or sacred things; impious irreverence. *OED*

**CHANCE** (see mutation)

**CHARLATAN** (see quack) An empiric who pretends to wonderful knowledge of secrets *esp.* in the healing art; and impostor, quack. *OED*

**CONFIDENCE** The mental attitude of trusting in or relying on; firm trust, reliance, faith. *OED*

**CONSENSUS** Agreement in opinion (see opinion). *OED*

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<sup>1</sup> **Noumenon**. Introduced by Kant to contrast to phenomenon: an object of purely intellectual intuition, devoid of all phenomenal attributes. **Phenomenon**. A thing that appears, or is perceived or observed; applied chiefly to a fact or occurrence, the cause of which is in question. That of which the senses or mind directly takes note; an immediate object or perception.

**CREATION** The calling into existence of the world; that which God has created. *OED* [Considered to have occurred in the year 4004 B.C.]

**CREATIONISM** A system or theory of creation. The theory which attributes the origin of matter, species etc., to special creation. The theory that God immediately creates a soul for every human being born. *OED*

**CREATOR** The supreme being who creates all things. One who, or that which, creates or gives origin to. *OED*

**CREDO** Latin: I believe; a profession of belief.

**DEBATE** (see discussion) [origin as battle, combat etc.] *n.* Strife, dissention, quarrelling, a quarrel; contention in argument; dispute; controversy; discussion. *v.* To fight, strive, quarrel, wrangle; to contest, dispute, contend for, argue, discuss; to consider. *OED*

**DEISM** (see atheism and theism) The doctrine or belief of a deist; usually, belief in the existence of a god, with rejection of revelation; ‘natural religion’. *OED*

**DEIST** (see atheist and theist) One who acknowledges the existence of a god upon the testimony of reason, but rejects revealed religion. *OED*

**DEITY** A divinity, a divine being, a god. A supreme being as creator of the universe. *OED*

**DELUSION** Anything that deceives the mind with a false impression; a deception; a fixed false opinion with regard to objective things, *esp.* as a form of mental derangement. *OED*

**DISCUSSION** (see debate) Examination (of a matter) by arguments for and against; debate; a disquisition in which a subject is treated from different sides. *OED*

**DISHONEST** Of actions etc.: Not straightforward or honourable, underhand. Of persons: Wanting in honesty; disposed to cheat or defraud. *OED*

**DISSENT** To disagree with or object to an action; to think differently, disagree, differ from. *OED*

**DIVINE** Of or pertaining to God or a god. Given by or proceeding from God. Addressed or denoted of God; religious, sacred. partaking of the nature of God; god-like. *OED*

**EMPIRICAL** Based on, or guided by, the results of observation and experiment only. Pertaining to or derived from experience.

**EVIDENCE** The quality or condition of being evident; ground for belief; that which tends to prove or disprove a conclusion; information that is given in legal investigation, to establish the point or fact in a question. *OED*

**EVOLUTION** Biological: The origination of species conceived as a process of development from earlier forms, and not as due to ‘special creation’. *OED*

“... consists of endless repetition of REPRODUCTION. In every generation, REPRODUCTION takes the genes that are supplied to it by the previous generation, and hands them on to the next generation but with minor random errors – mutations. This means that, as the generations go by, the total amount of genetic difference from the original ancestor can become very large, cumulatively, one step at a time. But although the mutations are random, the cumulative change over generations is not

random. The progeny in any one generation are different from their parent[s] in random directions. But which of those progeny is selected to go forward into the next generation is not random. This is where Darwinian selection comes in. The criterion for selection is not the genes themselves, but the bodies whose shapes the genes influence through DEVELOPMENT.” *RD*

**FACT** (see opinion) A thing done or performed; an action, deed; something that has really occurred or is the case; hence a datum of experience as distinct from conclusions; truth, reality. *OED*

**FAITH** Confidence, reliance, trust; belief proceeding from reliance on testimony or authority; beliefs in the truth of religion as contained in holy scripture or in the teaching of the church; the spiritual apprehension of divine truth; power to produce belief, credit. *OED*

**FALLACY** Deception, trickery; a deception; a lie; unsoundness (of arguments); delusiveness (of opinions etc.). *OED*

**FICTION** The action or product of fashioning or imitating; feigning, deceit, dissimulation, pretence; the action of feigning or inventing imaginary existences, events, states of things etc.; a supposition known to be at variance with fact, but conventionally accepted. *OED*

**FUNDAMENTALISM** (see liberal) Strict adherence to traditional orthodox tenets (e.g. the literal inerrancy of scripture) held to be fundamental to the Christian faith; opposed to *liberalism* or *modernism*. *OED*

**GOD** *Pre-Christian:* A superhuman person (regarded as masc. see Goddess) who is worshipped as having power over nature and the fortunes of mankind; a deity. *Christian and Monotheistic:* The one object of supreme adoration; the Creator and Ruler of the Universe.

**GOSPEL** The glad tidings (of the kingdom of God see Matt. iv, 23). Hence the Christian revelation, religion or dispensation. Often contrasted with the *Law*, i.e. the Old Testament dispensation. The record a Christ’s teaching, contained in the books written by the four evangelists [Matthew, Mark, Luke & John]; one of these books. *OED*

**GNOSTIC** (see agnostic) From Greek: gnosis γνῶσις *to know*. Relating to knowledge; cognitive; intellectual. Possessing esoteric spiritual knowledge; having a special knowledge of spiritual mysteries. *OED*

**GULLIBLE** Capable of being guided; easily duped. *OED*

**HERESY** Theological opinion or doctrine held in opposition to the ‘catholic’ or orthodox doctrine of the Christian Church. *OED*

**HETERODOX** (see orthodox) Not in accordance with established doctrines or opinions, or those generally recognised as orthodox.

**HONESTY** Honourable position or estate; respectability; respect; reputation; decency; decorum; uprightness of condition or conduct; straightforwardness; the the quality opposed to lying, cheating or stealing. *OED*

**HYPOTHESIS** (see theory) A subordinate thesis; a proposition or principle put forth or stated merely as a basis for reasoning or argument, or as a premiss from which to draw a conclusion. A supposition or conjecture put forth to account for known facts;

especially in the sciences, a provisional supposition which accounts for known facts and serves as a starting point for further investigation by which it may be proved or disproved. *OED*

**IGNORANT** Destitute of knowledge; unknowing, unlearned. Having no knowledge of; hence unconscious of, innocent of, having no share in.

**INTELLIGENT DESIGN** That all living organisms and complex organs are so complicated that they can only have come into existence by divine creation.

**IRREDUCIBLE COMPLEXITY** The basis of intelligent design: that living organisms and complex organs are too complicated each to have arisen by chance. Denies or does not understand the fundamental Darwinian process of non-random, gradual change. *OED*

**KNOWLEDGE** The fact of knowing a thing, state etc. or person; acquaintance; familiarity; acquaintance with a fact; state of being aware or informed; state of being acquainted with facts, range of information, ken; intellectual acquaintance with, or perception of fact or truth; the fact, state or condition of understanding; theoretical or practical understanding of an art, science, language etc. *OED*

### **LADY HOPE**

**LEGEND** (see myth) A story, history, account; an unauthentic story handed down by tradition and popularly regarded as historical. *OED*

**LIBERAL** (see fundamentalism) Free from restraint; free in speech or action; free from narrow prejudice; open minded; open to the reception of new ideas or proposals of reform. *OED*

**LIBERTARIAN** One who holds the doctrine of freedom of the will. One who approves of or advocates liberty. Hence the principle of Libertarianism. *OED*

**LIE** (see truth) *v.* To speak falsely; convey a false impression; be deceptive. *n.* A false statement with intent to deceive. *OED*

**LIAR** An untruthful person. *OED*

**LOGIC** The branch of philosophy that treats of the forms of thinking in general, and esp. of inference and scientific method; the fundamental science of thought and its categories (including metaphysics and ontology); a mode of argumentation viewed as good or bad according to its conformity or want of conformity to logical principles; a means of convincing or proving. *OED*

**LOGICAL** That is in conformity with the laws of correct reasoning; that follows as a reasonable inference; that is in accordance with the logic of events, of human character etc.; of persons: capable of reasoning correctly. *OED*

**MUTATION** (see chance)

**MYTH** (see legend) A purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons, actions or events, and embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena. *OED*

### **NATURAL SELECTION**

**NONSENSE** (see sense) That which is not sense; words which make no sense or convey absurd ideas; also absurd or senseless action; absurdity or nonsensicalness; unsubstantiated stuff or things. *OED*

**OBJECTIVITY** (see subjectivity) Treating a subject so as to exhibit the actual facts, not coloured by the feelings or opinions of the writer. *OED*

**OCCAM'S RAZOR** Based upon the *Lex parsimoniae* (law of parsimony or law of succinctness) principle devised by William of Ockham (c. 1285-1349) *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*: entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity or

The simplest solution tends to be the best one:  
the simplest explanation that covers all the facts.

**OPINION** (see fact) Judgement resting on grounds insufficient for complete demonstration; belief of something as probable or as seeming to one's own mind as true; what is generally thought about something; what one thinks about a particular thing, subject or point; a belief, view, notion; the formal statement by an expert or professional person of what s/he thinks, judges or advises on a matter; considered advice. *OED*

**ORTHODOX** (see heterodox) Holding correct, currently accepted, opinions, *esp.* in theology. Of opinions or doctrines: correct, true; in accordance with what is authoritatively established as the true view or right practice. Conventional. *OED*

**PIETY** Habitual reverence and obedience to God (or the gods); godliness, devoutness, religiousness. *OED*

**PRECONCEPTION** A conception or opinion entertained prior to [i.e. without] actual knowledge. *OED*

**PREPOSTEROUS** (see absurd) Originally: Reversed. Today: Contrary to nature, or to reason or common sense; monstrous; perverse, nonsensical; in later use, utterly absurd. *OED*

**PROFANE** To treat (what is sacred) with irreverence, contempt or disregard; to desecrate, violate; to misuse or abuse (what ought to be revered or respected); to violate, defile, pollute. *OED*

**PROSELYTE** One who has come over from one opinion, belief, creed or party to another: an convert. *OED*

**PROSELYTIZATION** To convert or attempt to convert another.

**QUACK** (see charlatan) An ignorant pretender to medical skill; one who boasts to have knowledge of wonderful remedies. One who professes a knowledge or skill of which he is ignorant. *OED*

**RATIONAL** Having the faculty of reasoning; endowed with reason; exercising one's reason in a proper manner; having sound judgement, sensible, sane; of, pertaining to or relating to reason; based on, derived from reason or reasoning; agreeable to reason; sensible; not foolish, absurd or extravagant. *OED*

**REASON** That intellectual power or faculty (usually regarded as a characteristic of mankind, but sometimes also attributed in a certain degree to the lower animals) which is ordinarily employed in adapting thought or action to some end; the guiding principle of the human mind in the process of thinking; The power whereby principles are grasped; the ordinary thinking facility of the human mind in a sound condition; sanity; A reasonable, sensible view of a matter. *OED*

**RELIGION** Action or conduct indicating a belief in, reverence for, and desire to please, a divine ruling power; the exercise or practice of rites or observances implying this. Recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny, and as being entitled to obedience, reverence and worship; the general mental and moral attitude resulting from this belief, with reference to its effect upon the individual or the community; personal or general acceptance of this feeling as a standard of spiritual and practical life. Devotion to some principle; strict fidelity or faithfulness; conscientiousness; pious affection or attachment. *OED*

**RESEARCH** An investigation directed to the discovery of some fact by careful study of a subject; a course of critical or scientific inquiry. *OED* [One of the fundamental tenets of scientific research is that any hypothesis must, at least in theory, be disprovable.]

**SCEPTIC** (U.S. skeptic) Originally, one who, like Pyrrho, doubts the possibility of real knowledge of any kind. Now, one who doubts the validity of what claims to be knowledge in some particular department of inquiry; a seeker after truth; an inquirer who has not yet arrived at definite conclusions. *OED*

**SCIENCE** The state or act of knowing; knowledge or cognisance of something specified or implied; also, knowledge (more or less extensive) as a personal attribute. Knowledge acquired by study; acquaintance with or mastery of any department of learning. *OED*

#### **SCIENTIFIC METHOD**

**SCRIPTURE** The sacred writings of the Old or New Testament; or both together; holy writ; the Bible. A particular passage of text in the Bible. *OED*

**SENSE** (see nonsense) The mental faculties in their normal condition of sanity; one's 'reason' or 'wits'; natural understanding, intelligence, especially as bearing on action or behaviour; practical soundness of judgement. *OED*

**SENTIENT** That feels or is capable of feeling; having the power or function of sensation or of perception by the senses. *OED*

**SOLIPSISM** The view or theory [n.b. definition of theory] that self is the only object of real knowledge or the only thing that is really existent.

**SOLIPSIST** One [the only one!] who accepts this theory.

**SPIRIT** The animating or vital principle in man (and animals [but, apparently, no other organisms]); that which gives life to the physical organism, in contrast to its purely material elements; the breath of life. Incorporeal or immaterial being, as opposed to body or matter; being or intelligence conceived as distinct from, or independent of, anything physical or material. The soul of a person as commended to God, or passing out of the body, in the moment of death. The immaterial, intelligent or sentient part of a person, frequently in implied or expressed contrast to the body. *OED*

**SPIRITUAL** Of, pertaining to or concerning the spirit or higher moral qualities, especially as regarded in a religious aspect. *OED*

**SUBJECTIVITY** (see objectivity) Consciousness of one's perceived states. The quality or condition of viewing things exclusively through the medium of one's own mind or individuality. *OED*

**TELEOLOGY** Natural objects or phenomena and their purpose.

**THEISM** (see atheism and deism) Belief in a deity or deities, as opposed to atheism. Belief on one god as opposed to polytheism or pantheism. Belief in one God as creator and supreme ruler of the universe, without denial of revelation (today, this use is distinct from DEISM). *OED*

**THEIST** (see atheist and deist) One who holds the doctrine of theism (today, distinct from DEIST). *OED*

**THEOLOGY** The study or science which treats God, his nature and attributes, and his relation with man and the universe. *OED*

**THEORY** (see hypothesis) A scheme or system of ideas or statements held as an explanation or account of a group of facts or phenomena; a hypothesis that has been confirmed or established by observation or experiment, and is propounded or accepted as accounting for the known facts; a statement of what are held to be the general laws, principles or causes of something known or observed. *OED*

**TRUST** To have faith or confidence; to rely or depend on. To give credence to (a statement); to rely upon the veracity or evidence of (a person, etc.). *OED*

**TRUTH** (see lie) The quality of being true (and allied senses); the character of being, or disposition to be, true to a person, principle, cause etc.; fidelity, loyalty, constancy, steadfast allegiance. Disposition to speak or act truly or without deceit; truthfulness, veracity, sincerity. Something that is true: true statement of account; that which is in accordance with the fact. *OED*

**VERACITY** The quality or character in persons of speaking or stating the truth; habitual observance of the truth. *OED*