

Discussion Questions on Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens
Religion and Society
2 February 2010

I. Begin by reviewing your homework.

1. Review questions (1)-(5) and compare your answers. If you find that there are places where your answers diverge, or where any of you are unsure of your answers, discuss these with the aim of resolving disagreements or confusion.
2. Share your answers to (6) and (7), in turn. For (6), do any of you detect a pattern in the way that the author cites supporting and opposing sources? For (7), do any of you detect anything problematic in the factual citations that the author provides? For both questions, discuss your views and see whether you can reach either a consensus or a mutual understanding of why you hold different views.

II. For the rest of your discussion, your goal is to reach a shared understanding of the overall, *rough*, structure of the author's argument. (This is "rough" – your goal isn't to create a formal argument reconstruction!) Begin by reviewing the author's preface or introductory chapter to answer the questions below.

1. What are the **main** points that the author introduces in the introduction? Look both for the overall thesis of the book as well as for other important points that the author dedicates some space and attention to. Make a list of them, putting the overall main thesis at the top. In making this list, see whether you can paraphrase them in simpler terms. Put page numbers by each. (Each of you should make your own list and keep it in your portfolio.)
2. Does the author say where he will develop each point, and if so, where? Put this information next to each point.
3. How are the above main points related to his overall thesis? Here are some different ways that a point can relate to the main thesis:
 - The point is intended to be a **central premise** in a deductive argument for the thesis
 - The point is intended to **provide some evidence** in favor of the thesis
 - The point is intended to **answer an objection** to the thesis
4. Use the poster paper to make a chart or diagram that represents the relations between the main points and the overall thesis. (Leave about 1/3 or 1/4 at the bottom of the poster for (5), below.)
5. Choose **one** main point to discuss further. It should be one in a chapter that you've read to this point (Dawkins, through ch. 5; Harris, through ch. 3; Hitchens, through ch. 9). In the author's more detailed discussion of this point, what seems to be the central **strength** of his case? What seems to be the greatest **weakness** in his case? At the bottom of your poster, put the strength and the weakness, and indicate which point they concern.
6. Be prepared to present and explain your poster this to the class (by spokespeople or as a group, as you like).