

Review of Craig and Meister, *God is Good, God is Great: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible*

Zoltan L Erdey

Craig WL and Meister C 2010. *God is Good, God is Great: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press.

1. The Four Horsemen (of rhetoric) and the New Atheism

For the proper understanding of the milieu of this book, it is important to introduce briefly a new atheistic movement. The contemporary context of apologetics was redefined in 2004 by Richard Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*. It marked the commencement of an atheistic movement often referred to as the *New Atheism*. Broadly speaking, *New Atheism* is an 'expression used primarily to distinguish secular thinkers who argue that religious faith and belief in gods are dangerous and destructive because they are essentially irrational and encourage irrationality and anti-scientific thinking' (www.skepticdictionary.com). The unofficial chief-ambassador of the movement, Richard Dawkins, states the principal hypothesis as follows (2008:56):

I am not attacking the particular qualities of Yahweh, or Jesus, or Allah, or any other specific God such as Baal, Zeus, or Wotan. Instead I shall define the God Hypothesis more defensibly: there exists a super-human, supernatural intelligence who deliberately designed and created the universe and everything in it, including us.

This book [*The God Delusion*] will advocate an alternate view: any creative intelligence, of sufficient complexity to design anything, comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution. Creative intelligences, being evolved, necessarily arrive late in the universe, and therefore cannot be responsible for designing it. God, in the sense defined, is a delusion.

This movement is an aggressive ‘intellectual’ movement targeted against deism and theism alike. The foremost authors associated with this movement (often referred to collectively as the *Four Horsemen*) include Sam Harris (*The End of Faith* and *A Letter to a Christian Nation*), Daniel Dennett (*Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*), Richard Dawkins (*The Bling Watchmaker*, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, and *The God Delusion*) and, most pertinent for the title of the reviewed book, Christopher Hitchens, the author of *God is Not Good, God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. The book by William Lane Craig and Chad Meister, *God is Good, God is Great: How Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible*, is therefore not only the antithesis in terms of title, but also, it is the antithesis of the central sentiments of Hitchens’ book and the other similar New Atheist authors: God is good, and he is great ... and he has made himself known to us through his world and Word.

2. The Purpose of the Book

The stated primary purpose of the book is ‘to answer challenges advanced by the New Atheists and others raising objections to belief in God and the Christian faith’ (2009:9). Further, ‘our aim with this project is to provide a well-argued resource ... to offer positive engagement in the on-going dialogue between those who believe in God and Christ and those who do not’ (10).

Given the sheer number of people who have lost or doubted their faith in the Judeo-Christian God as a result of the evangelistic efforts of the apostles of the New Atheism, it is important to note that there are in fact rational and plausible answers available to the objections raised by the *intelligentsia* of this movement. Therefore, I believe that this book indeed achieves its intended resolution, and *more*. By ‘more’, I mean to say that digesting the book cover-to-cover has left me with a sense of surprise, *not* by the potency of the arguments presented against the objections of the New Atheist philosophy, but rather, by the ‘evangelistic’ accomplishment of such old, worn-out, and reprocessed arguments against the Christian faith.

I do not mean to suggest that the questions and objections raised by the New Atheist movement are irrelevant or silly, and therefore undeserving of a respectable answer. Rather, my noted sentiment is rooted in the reflection of CS Lewis (1949:50):

To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because *bad philosophy must be answered*.

From this perspective, then, the book *God is Good, God is Great* has delivered more than it promised.

3. Chapter-by-Chapter Content Summary

The book follows a four-part layout, each consisting of essays presented by distinguished intellectuals and Christian apologists. In the words of the editors (Craig and Meister 2009:9–10): ‘we have sought out leading

thinkers representing a wide range of expertise—from cosmology, astrophysics and biology to New Testament studies, theology and philosophy—to join us in responding to these arguments and claims.’

Part one (*God Is*) presents essays that deal with God’s existence; part two (*God is Good*) presents a treatise of God’s creative design as perceivable through the telescope and microscope; part three (*God is Great*) addresses atheistic allegations pertaining to God’s goodness in the face of all the evil in the world; part four (*Why it Matters*) brings together all the general theistic issues discussed via four essays that centre on Christianity in particular.

2.1. Part one: *God is*

Richard Dawkins on arguments for God—William Lane Craig. In this first, rather combative, essay, Craig presents a critical analysis of Dawkins’ attempted refutation of the cardinal arguments for the existence of God (the cosmological, teleological, moral, and ontological arguments), as evaluated according to the three criteria of what makes for a good argument. For an argument to qualify as a good argument, it ‘must meet three conditions: (1) it obeys the rules of logic; (2) its premises are true; (3) its premises are more plausible than their opposites’ (Craig 2009:14). One by one, Craig gives a succinct post-mortem of each of Dawkins’ refutations, highlighting (what he considers) numerous logical fallacies in his reasoning and conclusions. A prime example of such inconsistencies in Dawkins’ philosophy is the moral argument, which contains two premises, followed by a conclusion:

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

As summed up by Craig, ‘Dawkins himself seems to be committed to both premises (2009:18). But the affirmation of the objective values and duties is incompatible with his atheism, for under naturalism we are just animals, relatively advanced primates, and animals are not moral agents. Affirming both of the premises of the moral argument, Dawkins is thus, on pain of irrationality, committed to the argument’s conclusion, namely, that God exists’ (19).

Overall, the analysis of Dawkins’ (a biologist) engagement in philosophical debate by Craig (a professional philosopher and theologian) is telling and thought provoking. I tend to agree with Craig’s conclusion, namely, that ‘the objections raised by Richard Dawkins (30) to these [five] arguments are not even injurious, much less deadly.’¹

¹ Before moving on, allow me to make note of my initial impression on the tone of William Lane Craig in the first chapter of this book. Arguably, the two central torch-bearing representatives in the theist vs. (new) atheist debate are William Lane Craig and Richard Dawkins. Both men are first-rate scholars, with impressive publication records. However, William Lane Craig, in my opinion, is the central figure representing Christianity in the intellectual arena of university campus debate halls. In light of Dawkins’ refusal to accept a challenge to a debate from Craig for many years (until late last year, albeit as part of a group of three), it is understandable that this book would provide Craig with an opportunity to engage with Dawkins’ views and ideas presented in his book, *The God Delusion*. On this front, this chapter did not disappoint. However, on numerous occasions, I felt that Craig attacked the man, not (as it ought to be) his arguments. This character assassination reached a climax in the last few lines of his chapter: ‘I can just imagine Dawkins making a silly ass of himself at this professional conference with his spurious parody, just as he similarly embarrassed himself at the Templeton Foundation conference in Cambridge with his flyweight objections on the teleological argument (30).’ In my opinion, such remarks are uncalled for, and simply ill mannered. At this point of my reading, I sincerely hoped that the other contributors avoided such libel, for our testimony to the world is far more important than winning an argument.

The image of God and the failure of scientific atheism—JP Moreland.

The second essay provides an informative justification for the existence of God from the perspective of a Christian worldview, with specific reference to the ontological component of human beings, namely humans, as God's image bearers. Moreland explains that a worldview is an explanatory hypothesis, which must give an adequate justification for the way the world is. However, explains Moreland, 'a theory may explain some facts quite nicely, but there are recalcitrant facts that doggedly resist explanation by theory. No matter what a theory's advocate does, the recalcitrant fact just sits there and is not easily incorporated into the theory' (33). And so, according to Moreland's argument, 'the ontological nature of the image of God in man, among other things, implies that the makeup of human beings [endowment of reason, self-determination, moral action, personality and rational formation and so on] should provide a set of recalcitrant facts for other [non-Christian] worldviews' (33). A case in point is scientific naturalism, a worldview that cannot, naturalistically, provide an adequate explanation of the ontological nature of human beings.

In the body of his essay, Moreland makes it evident that the Christian worldview, with specific reference to the doctrine of the image of God in man, provides a far better existential and philosophical validation for the five recalcitrant features of the image of God, namely, (a) the conscientious mind, (b) free will, (c) rationality, (d) the mind or the soul, and (e) intrinsic, equal value and rights. In the words of Moreland, he concludes that '...given the epistemological and Grand Story constraints placed on scientific naturalist ontology, not a single one of these five fits naturally in a non-ad-hoc way' (47).

From the perspective of an explanatory hypothesis, I find this essay to be rich in content, both theologically and philosophically.

Evidence of a morally perfect God—Paul K Moser. To say that the question of God's existence is an old question is a gross understatement. Thus, the primary purpose of the article is to examine the epistemological question, *how do you know God exists?* In other words, 'it seeks an explanation for how the belief that God exists exceeds mere belief, or opinion, and achieves the status of genuine knowledge' (49). Moser's essay highlights the salient point that the ethical or moral facet of God has implications for what we should anticipate to discover as confirmation for the existence of God. Thus, a morally robust version of theism is cognitively more resilient than contemporary critics have supposed (49). Throughout the essay, Moser successfully 'seeks to reorient some presuppositions usually packed into inquiry or arguments about the existence of God' (Anderson 2010:Amazon reviewer).

2.2. Part two: God is great

God and physics—John Polkinghorne. This first essay of the second part of the book is, to my mind, one of the best articles in the book. Polkinghorne successfully highlights the intellectual inadequacy of naturalistic philosophies by demonstrating that it is precisely from a theistic worldview perspective that the universe makes sense in the first place. Thus, he advocates the following central thesis: naturalistic materialism is an inadequate explanatory proposition for the existence of the universe, especially in light of the rational intelligibility of the universe. He then provides the first of two metaphysical possibilities for this position, explaining that 'the laws of physics seem to point beyond themselves, calling for an explanation of why they have this rational character. ... The deep intelligibility of the cosmos can itself be made intelligible if behind its marvellous order is indeed the mind of its Creator.' (67) In addition to the laws of physics pointing beyond

themselves, the fine tuning of the universe likewise adds accumulative strength to the theistic hypothesis. In the words of Polkinghorne, ‘the collection of anthropic insights seems altogether too remarkable and precise to be treated as just a happy accident. It seems to point beyond the brute fact of physical law and requires to be set in a context of deeper intelligibility’ (70). However, in order to avoid the conclusion of a fine-tuned universe, that is, the conclusion that the nature of the universe requires a creator, some atheists have embraced the multiverse hypothesis. The third sub-segment is a refutation of the multiverse hypothesis, a hypothesis that amounts to no more than ‘a grossly extended form of naturalism ... to avoid the conclusions available from within its own overall worldview’ (71–72).

In the remaining few pages, Polkinghorne provides a brief but informative context of the contemporary science plethora, and the numerous advances in the way the universe is understood. His discussion includes epigrammatic notes on the seeming intrinsic indeterminacy of nature (as related to quantum theory), and culminates with the latest in physics discussions, complexity theory.

Overall, the irony of this article for the scientific naturalist is that even the rational intelligibility of various anti-theistic naturalistic theories are a testament that the existence of our universe, in which such thinking is conceivable, was an act of creation by an intelligent designer. The very starting point of the atheistic hypothesis is therefore innately contradictory and philosophically inadequate.

God and evolution—Michael Behe. The theory of evolution, which broadly speaking seeks to explain the complexity and diversity of life observable in the world, remains one of the top rationalisations for agnosticism at best, and atheism at worst. More sobering is that the pretext of denying the existence of God, based on the theory of

evolution, is to confuse mechanism with agency. In other words, understanding how something works does not dispense or, for that matter, even alleviate the necessity of an engineer or designer. In this chapter, Behe demonstrates the rationality of assuming that a creative mind is behind our mind-bogglingly complex biological world, rather than Darwin's theory of evolution. His article sets the context with a brief historical account of the human understanding of the complexity of the world, and pins down just how such ancient perceptions have *panned out* in view of modern scientific discoveries such as the microscope. To this end, the central thrust of this excellent essay is the question, 'how does the modern discovery and understanding of DNA and RNA support Darwin's theory?' The humble tone of Behe's presentation is a breath of fresh air from the seeming overconfident air that I perceived in the first chapter of this book.

The 'take-away' concept of this chapter was Behe's appeal to respect the complexity of the modern version of Darwin's theory of evolution, and distinguish its three most important ideas, namely, (a) random variation, or mutation, (b) natural selection, and (c) common descent (84). Random mutation (both those that are beneficial and unprofitable), according to Behe, is the single biggest challenge to the theory of evolution. The two examples that he provides from genetic mutations in malaria and *E. coli* are interesting, with implications for both sides of the debate.

Although the author does not state clearly the purpose of the article, allow me to make the following (perhaps unfair) final observation. If Behe's chief rationale for penning this chapter was merely to present two experiments which *seem* to contradict the success of random mutation to offer an adequate account for the complexity and genetic diversity of life, then this chapter is a success. However, if his purpose was more ambitious (i.e. to challenge the thinking of sceptics, or to

provide some ammunition for young apologists in their ‘war-of-words’ with informed atheists), the article falls desperately short. Little knowledge is dangerous indeed.

Evolutionary explanations of religion—Michael J Murray. The initial two thirds of this essay provide a succinct context of the debate in which Murray catalogues the various scientific accounts for religion into three categories, namely, (a) natural cognitive disposition, (b) adaptation (religious beliefs and practices increase the likelihood of survival and reproduction), and (c) a by-product of other adaptive traits. With limited space to introduce such a vast and complicated sub-category, the author provides a brief explanation of three adaptive hypotheses, namely, supernatural punishment theories, costly signalling theories, and group selection theories; moving on to recapping the major tenets of the contemporary standard model, the cognitive model. The cognitive model contends that ‘human beings have specific and identifiable mental tools that make religious belief easy and natural’ (100). The quotation of Matthew Alper (101) frames the conclusion and sentiments of the above explanations:

If belief in God is produced by a genetically inherited trait, if the human species is ‘hardwired’ to believe in a spirit world, this could suggest that God doesn’t exist as something ‘out there’, beyond and independent of us, but rather as a product of an inherent perception, the manifestation of an evolutionary adaptation that exists exclusively within the human brain. If true, this would imply that there is no actual spirit reality, no God of gods, no soul, or afterlife. Consequently, humankind can no longer be viewed as a product of God, but rather, God must be viewed as a product of human cognition.

Earlier in this review, I noted a common philosophical blunder, namely, the supposition that if something is explicable in terms of its

mechanical function(s), it abolishes the need to infer a designer (e.g. the theory of evolution, as an explanatory hypothesis, removes the need of a designer and sustainer of the biological system). This chapter, then, seems to highlight an analogous issue – a conjectural explanation for the natural affinity of human beings towards religion does not lead to the logical conclusion that religious beliefs are, therefore, necessarily disreputable and untrue. At best, the natural consequence of such scientific explanation of religions leads to agnosticism, not atheism. Murray's illustration of this point is simple, yet efficacious.

Unfortunately, much of this essay repeatedly raised pertinent issues without providing any contextual explanation. In fact, on numerous occasions, Murray noted that space does not permit elaboration. In light of this, I am afraid that this chapter is not even an introduction to the various sub-categories of the subject, and could leave more advanced readers somewhat frustrated. Perhaps I am looking at it back-to-front, for this chapter is merely a 'teaser' that leaves readers hungry for more.

2.3. Part three: God is good

God, evil and morality—Chad Meister. The essential concern of this chapter relates to underlining the rationalisation for morality that the New Atheists offer. Given that none of the Four Horsemen of New Atheism are moral relativists (seemingly that is), they genuinely believe that moral actions (e.g. kindness, compassion, murder, rape) are either objectively good, or objectively evil. The sensible question must surely be: what is the ethical basis of such convictions, if there is no God in whom such convictions are rooted? As Meister (110) points out, '...*believing* that something is right or wrong and *justifying* one's belief that something is right or wrong are two very different matters.' In this essay, Meister attempts to demonstrate that from an atheistic

epistemological perspective, there are no satisfactory answers. For example, if morality or ethics is merely a socio-biological by-product of one or more evolutionary developments, then morality is nothing more than a merely personal subjective preference. Any effort to ground it objectively, according to Meister, remains inadequate. I found the lengthy quotations and synopses of the views held by the Four Horsemen helpful.

Is religion evil?—Alister McGrath. In my opinion, this chapter is the most informative and academically astute essay of this book. The objectivity and intellectual integrity of the author's critical analysis of the New Atheist philosophies was inspiring, especially given the space constraints. Arguing against the naïve and unscientific notion that religion is inherently evil and the general cause of extreme wickedness (e.g. the crusades, Salem witch trials, etc.), McGrath proposes that the real issue at hand is absolutism or totalitarianism, not religion *per se*. He explains that 'people create and sustain absolutes out of fear of their own limitations, and people react with violence when others do not accept them. Religion may have a tendency towards absolutism, but the same tendency is innate in any human attempt to find or create meaning, especially when it is challenged' (122–123). This is not exclusive to religious convictions, but extends to politics, patriotism, democracy, race, gender, and yes, even New Atheism. Having carefully justified such sentiments, McGrath highlights two philosophical blind spots in the theoretical framework of New Atheist writers, namely, (a) the atheist violence committed against religion in an attempt to reach an atheistic social utopia, and (b) the creation, through their own philosophy of binary oppositions (in-groups [Atheists] and out-groups [the religious]).

Overall, McGrath makes a convincing case against the simplistic *sound bites* of Dawkins and his allies, 'ideally attuned to media-driven culture

which prefers breezy slogans to serious analysis: *religion is evil*' (119–120). As long as human nature remains depraved, social evils remain firmly on the doorstep of *people*, whether religious or not.

Are Old Testament laws evil?—Paul Copan. The top objection (by both philosophers and lay people alike) to the existence of God usually revolves around the problem of evil. Since such objections do not *stick* in light of the life and ministry of Jesus, objectors often skip the New Testament and ground this objection in various Old Testament passages which seem to exhibit (to *them* at least) the depravity and evil of its laws. In this chapter, Paul Copan provides much-needed context for such laws, demonstrating that the New Atheist 'sound bite' (borrowing McGrath's term), 'Old Testament laws are evil' is merely a trivialization of Yahweh's person, ethics, and character, and that a real inconsistency exists between 'their "objective" moral outrage and naturalism' (152).

At first glance, Copan's contentions that the Mosaic Law is not the ideal and *final* ethic, but rather, it 'reflects a meeting point between divine/creational ideals and the reality of human sin and evil societal structures' (138), seemed a meagre justification to me. But with some reflection upon the carefully argued and presented five sub-points, such reservations gave way, as the far-reaching consequences of sin became painfully obvious (in terms of both the past and the present). Old Testament laws make more sense viewed through the lenses of a gracious God tolerating unholy human behaviour, than a naturalistic universe.

How could God create hell?—Jerry L Walls. 'It is precisely because God is a God of love that people may wind up in hell' (160) is the thesis advocated in this article. To elaborate, only in a world in which a loving God freely permits humans to either love or reject him (a.k.a. free will),

can a hell exist by inevitability. The author developed this *recycled* (albeit still potent and persuasive) idea throughout the bulk of the article, with the support of a helpful dance metaphor. From an academic perspective, Walls' concluding considerations (i.e. it is irrational to reject God, for that is, in effect, choosing to go to hell) are *merely* the thoughts of CS Lewis and, thus, this article contains no original thinking or ideas (apart from a creative use of a metaphor in apologetics). From an evangelical perspective, it lacks any scriptural support, which is perhaps the gravest weakness of this apologetic. Notwithstanding, the essay is well-written and easy to follow, and is sure to leave readers with much to think about. Perhaps the examination of the scriptures could be the by-product of this read!?

2.4. Part four: why it matters?

Recognizing divine revelation—Charles Taliaferro. The author offers an overview of the concept of divine revelation, and reviews four often-cited objections to it from the perspective of a 'framework of inquiry' (170). Taliaferro's short essay is an attempt to reveal that the rejection of divine revelation by the New Atheists (especially Daniel Dennett) is due to an atheistic presuppositional frame of analysis (i.e. view of nature, history, and values). The illustration from the life and convictions of David Hume is curious.

The Messiah you never expected—Scot McKnight. From the perception of first century observers, the words and works of Jesus permit for an array of beliefs as to who he was. In fact, Jesus asked his disciples this same question. Matthew records four possibilities, namely, John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. McKnight takes this further and sketches ten possible 'items the contemporaries of Jesus most likely saw when they listened to and watched Jesus' (188). The

thrust of this article is evangelistic, in that it probes for an answer to a question that Christ asked of the disciples: ‘But who do you say that I am?’ (Mt 16:15b). The one line conclusion is powerful and effective.

Tracing Jesus’ resurrection to its earliest eyewitness accounts—Gary R Habermas. According to Habermas, 1 Corinthians 15:3–7 is an incredibly valuable passage of scripture within the context of Christ’s resurrection debate. In his careful historical exposition, he demonstrates that ‘the two epistles unanimously recognised as Paul’s, 1 Corinthians and Galatians, provide the basis for showing that the original resurrection proclamation was exceptionally early and linked to the initial eyewitnesses themselves’ (202), and thus, rooted in historical tradition. Post read his argument almost seems to make common sense.

A frequent objection advocated by the New Atheist contingent is the similarity of the various components of Christianity (e.g. supernatural events surrounding the virgin birth, the resurrection, etc.) to other ‘much earlier’ religions. Habermas’ epigrammatic thoughts on these objections are absorbing and informative.

Why faith in Jesus matters—Mark Mittelberg. This last article commences with the following contention: everyone (including the New Atheists) has faith in something, in spite of the absence of proof in the absolute sense.² Therefore, explains Mittelberg, the correct and

² William Craig highlighted this truth in a debate with Peter Atkins. ‘I think there are a good number of things that cannot be scientifically proven but are all rational to accept. Let me list five. Logical and mathematical truths cannot be proven by science. Science presupposes logic and maths, so that to try and prove them by science would be arguing in a circle. Metaphysical truths, like “there are other minds other than my own”, or “that the external world is real”, or “that the past was not created five minutes ago with the appearance of age”, are rational beliefs that cannot be scientifically proven. Ethical beliefs about statements of value are not accessible by

honest questions are: *why trust Jesus?* and *why does trusting Jesus matter?*

With respect to the first question, the reader is encouraged to answer only after carefully considering the trustworthiness of the object of our faith. Then, the author extracts certain truths from various New Testament passages, presenting Jesus as a worthy recipient of faith. ‘He [Jesus] is faithworthy’ (222).

Finally, why does faith in Jesus matter? Because God is great, God is good—but we’re neither (222) ... and we desperately need what he offers (225).³

3. Strengths of the Book

As a thematic synopsis of the contemporary apologetics landscape, this book is unparalleled. Simply stated, the book, *God is Good, God is*

the scientific method. You can’t show, by science, whether the Nazi scientists in the camps did anything evil as opposed to the scientists in the Western democracies. Aesthetic judgments (no. 4) cannot be accessed by the scientific method. And finally, and most remarkably, would be science itself. Science cannot be justified by the scientific method. Science is permeated with improveable assumptions’ (Craig, www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkBD20edOco).

³ Albeit only mentioned in a footnote, the postscript is worthy of mention. The late Anthony Flew was arguably the world’s foremost philosophical atheist of the 20th century. After a lifetime of antagonism towards religion and faith (specifically the truth claims of Christianity), Flew converted to a rudimentary form of deism in his late 70’s. Incidentally, Richard Dawkins dismissed his conversion as a result of old age. In any case, although deism is still a long way from theism and Christianity in particular, the manuscript of the interview by Gary Habermas discussing Flew’s pilgrimage from atheism to theism makes for a fascinating and absorbing read. I could not help but smile while I imagined Richard Dawkins giving a similar account in an interview in the near future (whether in this life or the next).

Great is an outstanding resource that should form part of the library of any Christian believer who has wrestled with the difficult questions raised by the New Atheists. From the perspective of a theologian with interests in philosophy and the ‘art’ of apologetics, this book introduces coherently the key concepts and philosophies of the major players on the recent apologetics stage.

Secondly, since much of the *sound bites* of the Four Horsemen have reached popular domains, the worth of this book goes beyond the presentation of the dialogues between atheists and theists. It demonstrates that such discussions are not closed, but in fact open. Reading atheistic humanist literature, one may be persuaded to conclude that God is dead, and that the dazzling science of the New Atheists killed him. But in reality, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, it seems that it is actually the New Atheists who rely on the ignorance of the general public about issues of theology and the philosophy of religion. It is the very thing that makes their arguments so evangelistically efficacious. Be that as it may, the various contributing authors of this book have demonstrated not only that oversimplified objections to Christianity (in specific) do not stand up to closer intellectual scrutiny, but that such explanations do not automatically eliminate God from existence. Thus, the book is apologetically relevant, intellectually stimulating, *and* faith edifying.

Lastly, this book should assist students to distinguish between true evidence and mere smokescreen rhetoric. New Atheist philosophers occasionally go beyond the logical and scientific presentation of evidence of presenting subjective objections about their personal dislikes of the notion of God and other associated topics (i.e. his ways and his character). It is not an overstatement to say that it is the ugly rhetoric of the New Atheists that fans the flames of agnosticism at best,

and atheism at worst. Such personal objections however, no matter how passionate they are, have no bearing on whether Christianity is true.

4. Weaknesses of the Book

The first notable weakness, ironically, is also its strength. Although the book provides an excellent framework for the contemporary apologetics scene, it leaves more advanced and informed readers dissatisfied with the superficiality that may characterise *selected* chapters. The concise nature of the content of each chapter may leave more analytical readers unconvinced. Moreover, it is difficult to ascertain whether the authors were in fact setting up ‘straw man’ arguments, without first reading the primary sources that they have reviewed. For example, it is difficult to tell from a short article, such as Moreland’s essay (ch. 2), whether he is in fact demolishing the *best* naturalistic explanatory theory for each of the five ‘recalcitrant features of the image of God’, without additional research into scientific naturalism as an explanatory worldview. This is not to suggest that Moreland is one to erect straw men, but I recommend studying this book in conjunction with additional background research, otherwise the victory proclaimed in the various articles will be a hollow one indeed. Readers must avoid the danger of taking the lazy route by putting blind faith in the word of particular authors, without getting to know both sides of the arguments.

A major weakness that seriously affects the usability of this book relates to its context of use. Although the book would be a valuable addition to one’s library, its value remains chiefly within the framework of Western apologetics methods and answers. From the perspective of an African apologetics framework, the book remains practically unusable. Questions of God’s existence, the historicity of

biblical narratives, and similar questions are simply non-issues within the African context.

Conclusion

From an apologetic perspective, the New Atheist movement is the most recent and belligerent movement that cannot be disregarded by Christians, especially in view of the unwarranted popularity it has received in lay circles. Undoubtedly, the majority of the objections to the Christian faith that will emerge in the near future will originate from the authors of this movement. Therefore, the book '*God is good, God is great*' is worth its weight in Rands.

Reference List

Dawkins R 2008. *The God delusion*. New York: First Mariner Books.
Lewis CS 1949. *The weight of glory*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.