

Review: A.C. Grayling, *The God Argument: The Case against Religion and for Humanism*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013

Pages: 258

Doing What's Right in Your Own Eyes

An amateurish attempt to persuade readers of two things: God doesn't exist, and that you can still live a 'good' life by designing your own rules.

Like all atheists, the author makes energetic appeals to such supernatural things as the laws of logic and mathematics without giving a logical reason for their existence and trustworthiness. In this way he steals Christian axioms, that such laws are unchanging and always predictable only because they are part of an eternal, unchanging and predictable God (Hebrews 13.8 reads "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and forever").

'Arguments' presented against God's existence and His absolute moral standards include:

- i. The universe somehow caused itself and all things via evolutionary processes (there is no design).
- ii. Natural evil makes God either evil or not omnipotent.
- iii. The "Euthyphro [Non]Problem" makes God immoral (He could redefine evil as good), or morality an independent thing.
- iv. For various political, social, and psychological reasons man simply created God, starting from nature gods up to a transcendent monotheistic God.
- v. 'God' is undefinable and therefore cannot be argued for.

The author stumbles at ii. by ignoring God created a perfect universe, and that it was man who caused natural evil through sin (the author doesn't believe in sin). God is therefore unblameable for any natural evil in this fallen world.

For iii. he assumes "goodness" can be separated from God, an impossibility as God is good, not that he merely knows what good is.

iv. follows if i. is true and is where the 'action' lies, for atheism lives or dies by evolution. To prove all life came from non-life 4Gya years ago in a miraculous event (abiogenesis), then randomly mutated and was changed by the environment into every form of asexual and sexual organism, he offers:

i. Radiometric dating: no samples are provided and contrary evidence is ignored, e.g:

-Wild 'long-age' radiometric dates for rocks with known young ages, e.g., four twelve-year old dacite samples from Mt St Helens in 1992 yielding K-Ar 'ages' between 340k and 2.8m years old!

-2003 '1.5B year-old' zirconium silicate crystals from U-decay had so much retained He gas inside their ages could only be 6,000 +/-2,000 years old.

-2006/7 carbon-dated Triceratops and Hadrosaur dinosaur material at c30,000 years old (not 65 million under the evolutionary story).

Grayling admits his "deep time" crutch is crucial noting Darwin's confession that evolution was a non-starter without Charles Lyell's 'long ages'.

ii. Evolution is a biological fact: 'Vestigial' organs like the appendix are wheeled out which for a long time have been known to serve a purpose. The author refutes himself throughout

Part I by asking observable and repeatable science to prove an unobservable and unrepeatable story about the past (evolution).

Regarding v., Christians have a simple definition of God: Jesus Christ (Colossians 2..9: “For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”).

Overall, the work is a combination of man-centred morality, old straw men arguments, a poor understanding of the creationist position, and laziness or fear in keeping up with recent scientific evidence contrary to the author’s deeply held religious beliefs. It will succeed in deceiving simple or unstable souls looking for 'reasonable' excuses to live life denying God's existence and their accountability to His laws in life and after death.

Acknowledgements (pp. i-ii)

The author thanks well known atheopaths Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens.

Introduction (pp. 1-9)

The author equates sinfulness with “perfectly natural desires”.

Humanism is a “truer” source of what is “good”.

Natural evil of cancer, disability, and tsunamis kill tens of thousands of babies.

The atheist’s “I just choose to believe, despite everything” strawman is employed.

Arguing against religion is said to be an argument of liberation of the human mind (cf. II Peter 2.19).

Humanism is premised on kindness and common sense about “the good”, and is an alternative to the religious “nostalgia for the absolute”.

I) Clarifications (pp. 13-21)

Religion is assumed to exist because of child indoctrination before reaching the age of reason (the statement “doubtless sounds polemical”!).

‘Faith’ is defined as something independent of the existence of testable evidence.

‘Religion’ is defined as a set of beliefs focused on a god or gods.

II) Naming and Describing a ‘god’ (pp. 23-33)

If God is all-loving, etc., how can He tolerate pain, misery, and arbitrary suffering, independent of the “merits” of the sufferer. Here Romans 3.12 is ignored: sufferers have no intrinsic merit.

Natural evil is claimed to be inconsistent with a benevolent agency. Genesis 2.17 explains it was man’s decision that created natural evil.

Omnipotence is claimed to be a problem because it applies anything is possible. The author defines “no-things” as things here, i.e., that God should be able to do the logically-impossible (e.g. be and not be God at the same time).

No account is given for the existence or reliance on the laws of logic.

Concepts that cannot be tested are deemed philosophically worthless (the author ignores the non-testability of evolution).

Christianity is claimed to borrow from Greek religion (e.g. Zeus and his thirty-odd human concubines giving birth to Hercules, Castor and Pollux, Helen of Troy, Alexander of Macedon).

III) The Origins of Religion (pp. 35-40)

Powers were first located in nature with water nymphs, tree dryads, river, sea, and thunder gods. As knowledge increased God became transcendent and monotheistic and ultimately moved outside of space and time.

The symbiotic relationship between priests and rulers became a powerful instrument of social control.

The world's major religions contradict each other.

IV) An Axe to the Root (pp. 41-47)

In 1996, the Church of England's General Synod said hell was merely an absence of God.

The author believes hell is 'divise' in that it condemns non-Christians.

V) Knowledge, Belief and Rationality (pp. 49-56)

Propositions to be true must pass a test of 'reason', observation, or both.

Appeal is made to the "ethics of rationality".

Biology (evolution) is said to be constructed on the basis of observation!

VI) Agnosticism, Atheism and Proof (pp. 57-63)

Bertrand Russell, an agnostic, nevertheless proclaimed himself "at one with the atheists".

VII) Theistic Arguments (pp. 65-72)

The genetic fallacy of children believing because of parents is employed.

It is claimed God cannot be spoken of nor described.

VIII) Argument by Design (pp. 73-81)

The question is asked “where did the creating agency pop up from?” (erroneously assuming He had a beginning).

‘Vestigial’ examples are put forward as evidence of bad design (e.g. wisdom teeth and the human appendix).

There are supposedly two dozen evolutionary pathways to create eyes (even worse they are claimed to be empirical)!

The Goldilocks Enigma is explained as no enigma because the author would not have existed to observe it unless such fine tuning existed (i.e. he just assumes it is given that a universe just exists as a brute fact)!

IX) Arguing by Definition (pp. 83-93)

Occam’s Razor is applied to make an explanation of the supernatural laws of nature unnecessary.

The *sensus divinitus* is discounted as a reason to believe.

X) Causes, Wagers and Morals (pp. 95-106)

The cosmological argument claims everything is governed by causation, or the principal of sufficient reason (there must be a first cause).

Science is claimed to have reconstructed the beginning.

The context Pascal’s Wager is expected utility.

In deductive logic all inferences are *petition principii* (question-begging). Inductive inferences are ‘ampliative’.

Children are “evolutionary primed” to be credulous.

“Good” atheists are said to prove the existence of morality without God.

The Euthyphro ‘Problem’ claims God is capricious regarding good or evil, or that he only follows an external concept of ‘good’.

XI) Creationism and ‘Intelligent Design’ (pp. 107-128)

The 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial is hailed as the death-knell for six-day creationism.

Radiometric dating is claimed to prove the earth is billions of years old.

The only part of RATE’s work mentioned is their hypothesis of accelerated rates of decay across history (creation, pre-flood, and flood).

It is correctly stated that Darwinism is not compatible with religion.

“Biological evolution is a fact even though detailed questions about its mechanisms continue to be explored” (!)

Greek thinkers proposed forms of evolution.

The blind spot at the centre of the retina is claimed as proof of no design in the eye.

Darwin gave up studying medicine at Edinburgh University, and on his Beagle trip read the first volume of Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology*. This was the basis of “everything which I have done in science”.

XII) The Three Debates (pp. 131-138)

Grayling appeals to “rigorous tests of verifiability or falsifiability” rather than the “superstitions of illiterate herdsmen living several thousands of years ago.”

In a liberal civilised society different religions should **coexist** (like the bumper sticker). This tolerance is only to be extended insofar as the intolerant is not tolerated!

XIII) Humanism: The Ethics of Humanity (pp. 139-150)

Humanism says each person is responsible for choosing his values and living considerately towards others. While seeking “the good”, it rejects religious claims about the source of morality.

Cicero said people should be free to think for themselves and that all humanity is a **brotherhood**.

Secular humanism sprung up in the 18thC in the “Enlightenment” and was a “maturation” of humankind.

Humanism involves no supernaturalism but there is much debate about what human good really is.

XIV) Humanism and the Good Life (pp. 151-175)

Aristotle exercised “practical wisdom” called *phronesis* which is a “middle path”. His inner security and peace of mind was called *ataraxia*.

Stoicism’s two pillars are indifference and self-control.

Epicureanism advises people to “pursue pleasure and avoid pain”.

Cynicism lives life as close to nature as possible.

Grayling gives credit to the Reformation for enabling freedom of thought.

Consequentialism says the target of morality evaluation are *outcomes*. From this philosophy comes utilitarianism.

Deontology holds that the acts themselves are the target.

Applied ethics is a new type of philosophy.

A humanist's life choices must stand up to scrutiny and should have a number of characteristics:

-Meaningfulness.

-Relationships.

-Activity.

-Honesty.

-Responsibility.

-Optimism.

-Integrity.

Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) says the most important introspective question is "Do I or do I not wish to commit suicide?".

Good relationships tend to be chosen.

One who tells "white lies" is said to have a good justification for judicious deception.

Humanists simply assume free will exists even though "neuroscience" is leaning towards it being illusory.

XV) Putting the World to Rights (pp. 177-183)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 was accepted by all member states at the time.

XVI) Shared Humanity, Human Diversity (pp. 185-189)

Ethics is about the achievement of intelligent well-being and doing whereas morality is what is permissible and forbidden.

XVII) The Ethical and the Moral (pp. 191-197)

The great “sin” is harming others.

Moral agents make ethical decisions which affect moral patient.

Humanists believe the natural environment and animals are “moral patients” and so deserve human rights.

XVIII) A Humanist on Love, Sex and Drugs (pp. 199-216)

Infatuation is the solder that fuse people together on which the world is drunk.

Aristotle believed sex an existential threat to be suppressed.

The Greeks encouraged homosexual and pederast activity.

Sigmund Freud and Sherlock Holmes both used cocaine.

XIX) Humanism. Death and the Ends of Life (pp. 217-236)

There is a distinction between dying and death.

Assisted suicide is consciously desired while involuntary euthanasia is not.

Death is claimed to be a dreamless sleep that existed before conception.

Passive euthanasia (withholding life-preserving treatment) is legal. The 'doctrine of double effect' gives licence to doctors to euthanize by de facto as a consequence of alleviating patient suffering.

Thanatology is proposed as a medical discipline to help people to die.

Abortion is rightly claimed a deliberate termination of a human life.

XX) Religion Revisited (pp. 237-246)

"Blasphemy" comes from *blaptein* (injure) and *pheme* (reputation).

XXI) Humanism and the Ethical Dimension (pp. 247-253)

XXII) The Better Alternative (pp. 255-258)