



Gunning for God: A Critique of the New Atheism

John C. Lennox

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New ideas about the nature of God and Christianity that will give Dawkins' best friends and worst enemies alike some stimulating food for thought

Tackling Hawking, Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, and a newcomer in the field—the French philosopher Michel Onfray—John Lennox points out some of the most glaring fallacies in the New Atheist approach in this insightful book. Since the twin towers crashed to the ground on September 11, there has been no end to attacks on religion. Claims abound that religion is dangerous, that it kills, and that it poisons everything. And if religion is the problem with the world, say the New Atheists, the answer is simple—get rid of it. Of course, things aren't quite so straightforward. Arguing that the New Atheists' irrational and unscientific methodology leaves them guilty of the very obstinate foolishness they criticize in dogmatic religious folks, this erudite and wide-ranging guide to religion in the modern age packs some debilitating punches and scores big for religious rationalism.

Gunning for God: A Critique of the New Atheism Details

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Joe Oaster says

My second book I have read by Dr. Lennox. I have actually seen in live doing a presentation and he is among the smartest people I have ever met. I have watched his debates on you tube and he is a brilliant man and scholar. To Dr. Lennox credit as smart as he is, he is able to present and layout his thesis in clear and readable fashion. Great book laying out a great defense of Christianity. Recommended read by even those not of the faith who want an honest intellectual look at both sides of the argument.

David Haines says

This book would be considered a work of general apologetics. The Author responds to a number of accusations that are brought against Christianity by the New Atheists. In the course of responding to them we are brought through a number of different domains of research, including psychology, physics, biology, history, archeology, higher criticism, philosophy and theology. The author interacts with each of the domains with ease, and renders them understandable for the lay-man. I have not read a book that is purely apologetic in years, but I must say that this book is a pleasure to read. I think that it is relatively just to say that John Lennox is the C.S. Lewis of this generation. With an amazing eloquence, and respect he points out the logical errors and incoherencies in the feeble war-cries of the New Atheists. This book is a must read for anyone who is interested in Christian apologetics, whether or not one is a christian or an atheist.

Adrian Hart says

Although some of the author's critiques of the New Atheist movement are spot-on (i.e. mere disbelief in God does not automatically make you *Bright*), the final chapters border on the inane as he tries to "prove" such things as miracles and the divinity of Christ. You get the sense that he's preaching to the converted in the second half of the book. I didn't believe in Christianity before I read this book, and I still don't believe in it now

Bram says

Honest, coherent, logically convincing. If you are impressed by Hawking, Hitchens et all, and you don't want to change opinions, stay away from this book. His explanation on the resurrection and theories around that are very convincing reading. Disarming the New Atheists as intellectually sloppy on their own terms; quite a feat!

Joseph Sverker says

This is one of the best, of probably actually the best, apologetic book dealing with the New Atheism that I have read. Lennox writes with huge authenticity and authority, yet remaining a very humble tone throughout (even though he cannot resist the temptation of hitting some jibes against Dawkins' and Hitchen's (unbelievable) ignorance about mainstream Christianity and biblical scholarship.) I know that people in the atheism camp probably will not read it and if they do they will say that it is simply the same answers as Christians always give and as such it can be brushed under the carpet. But if it is the same answers it is themselves that are to blame because the atheists hasn't really brought anything new since Lucretius, except for perhaps Darwin and how his theory of evolution has been used. The ending is an absolutely excellent summary of the main Christian beliefs and if someone wants to read a very short introduction to contemporary evangelical view of the historicity and importance of the Gospels and resurrection then is is a great place to start.

One argument that I would like to hear a response to is Lennox's response to Hitchens theory that the theory of gravity explains everything, even the creation of the universe. Lennox states that the theory is one thing, but the creation of matter is a completely different one. It is so simple yet profound, and I suppose this question was the reason why Aristotle argued that matter was eternal (which many scientist seemed to have believed up until the mid 20th century), because where does the stuff come from? Can a theory create matter - no it can't according to Lennox and I am ready to agree with him. Anyway, I'm sure that there will be responses and that there will be much walking around in circles in the Atheism-Theism debate, but to my mind this is a very credible inclusion to the debate!

Paul Bryant says

Here then is a book arguing against some ill-mannered people who are making needlessly offensive remarks about something I don't believe in but think we should all be polite about. I don't like the New Brash Atheists but I don't like John Lennox's book either (but I'll give it a solid three stars, he really does try hard).

This book is a refutation of a refutation. The "New Atheists" came out and refuted Christianity, so John C Lennox, Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University no less, is refuting their refutation. Dawkins says "yah! You Christians suck!" and Lennox says "oh yeah? Well you suck worse and you never wash your socks!"

In fairness Lennox does acknowledge that Dawkins & his crew are not every atheist's cup of tea, they sure ain't mine:

Atheists are clearly divided about the aggressive approach of the New Atheists, and some find it positively embarrassing

WHAT IS FAITH?

If scientific research is thought to be still worth pursuing, scientists have to believe in the rational intelligibility of the universe as their fundamental article of faith or basic assumption. You cannot begin to do physics without believing in that intelligibility.

The concept of faith brings on one of my headaches – once again we are dragged into the semantic morass :

is atheism a faith? Well, I'm still saying no. Prof Lennox says that I myself believe in loads of stuff I can't prove – electricity, Goldilocks planets, black holes, Susan Boyle, subatomic particles. But I believe that people *other than me* can rigorously prove their existence. Not so with religious assertions. You have no proof, you only have revelation.

A religious friend of mine says well, look here, for a couple of thousand years almost everybody has believed in this stuff, and you say they were all wrong. Brainy people, too. Isn't that a leetle bit arrogant? And I say well, yes, I think they were all wrong. It's a bit feeble.

...AND JUSTICE FOR ALL

Prof Lennox tries to say that religion is not just wish-fulfilment. But here he is on the subject of justice:

At times I try to imagine what the glorious realm is like, and the question arises within me : if the veil which now separates the seen and the unseen world were to be parted for a moment, and we could see how God has treated, say, the myriads of innocent children who have suffered from horrendous evil... is it just possible that all our concerns about God's handling of the situation would instantly dissolve?

I fear the answer, from me anyway, would be no. Lennox's idea of justice is different to mine – or perhaps, it's the concept of "justice" itself which is offensive to me. If a great crime is committed – Lennox's example is Josef Mengele's horrible experiments on children at Auschwitz – he says that there will be a Judgement Day. So Mengele and all his accomplices will be judged and punished, we earnestly believe. And that is justice. No one will ever get away with anything, even if it looks like they do from our earthly perspective.

But before my eyes there is still the great suffering which happened, and great suffering plus great punishment does not make it all good. The original grief, pain and misery cannot un-happen. The punishment of the offenders is a footnote and does not fix anything, ask the parents of any murdered child.

WHAT HAS AN ATHEIST GOT THAT ANYONE WOULD WANT TO BUY?

Nothing. Lennox gets this right, and atheists have to cough up. We offer no hope, no firm foundation of morality (although Lennox comes very close to saying in the crudest possible way that if you ditch religion there will be moral chaos – what, we don't have moral chaos now? Of course we do.)

Why anyone would want to abandon their faith and become an atheist is beyond me. I would never recommend that. It's not a very cheery thing to be. Have you ever seen an Ingmar Bergman film? It's like that.

WE SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY

The more I read Christian writers the more I have to rather sadly conclude that there is no talking to them, and, from their point of view, there is no talking to me. We have entirely different concepts of what evidence is, for instance, or what makes life meaningful – we are forever talking past each other. The visions which Christians find beautiful atheists consider horrific, such as Christ's death on the cross and the concept of atonement, and such as the idea of heaven and hell.

A GOD I COULD BELIEVE IN

No one examines what God is much, in the Christian books I have read. The authors assume we all think the same thing about God, that he is omnipotent, eternal, creator of the universe and creator of himself. Oh and

also, that he is completely interested in and involved with humanity. But I think differently. I think it's very likely there was something we *may as well* call God for want of a better term – it's what the astrophysicists try to explain about the big bang and the creation of the laws of physics and gravitational singularities and what-all. It happened, it was real, us non-astrophysicists will never understand it. It's all way above our pay grade. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. That still sounds good to me.

But why we need to assume that God *continued to exist* after the Big Bang is something I never quite got – God was a one time thing, a fleeting micro-moment. He only stuck around to create the universe, once that was done, and it didn't take long, he was gone like snow on the water. Job done.

OR MAYBE

Or, okay, let's go with the idea that God didn't go away. I can imagine him getting lonely, like the Christian writers propose (they actually do say that), and wanting to create some creatures with free will to see what would happen. I imagine him not getting it right first time, having not done it before, so there would be various attempts at making a planet which could evolve human beings (God created evolution, I never saw any contradiction there). So, just like Windows, I think there would be several versions of the Humanity Experiment before he got it right. In this scenario I think the human race we have here on this planet is clearly an early version (2.1 maybe) - there's so much wrong with it, you don't need me to make a list. I imagine God occasionally remembering Planet Earth with a shudder. He thinks he should probably have deleted us a long time ago. Maybe he'll get round to it soon, just after he fixes the bugs in Humanity 12.

Peter says

Surprised by Ridicule

Apologetic double speak , nonsense on stilts Etc

Some useful criticism of excesses of some " new atheists " , dated and narrowly focused on either straw manning or some good criticism of some actual OTT positions held by some atheists . Biased in the extreme , labels atheists as caricaturing the bible by saying it talks of a God that sees everything when, ahem, it actually does . Lennox moves effortlessly between literal and metaphorical views as it suits him. Cheekily criticises atheists for saying " probably no god" yet is quite happy to state that various god "events " are unquestionably real. Read it critically, some good insights but alas embedded in layers of superstitious drivel that it's probably not worth trying . In terms of his previous books, it's very similar in style and tone. A few new opinions but little to add from his " god's undertaker" etc

Naomi says

I like John Lennox and enjoyed this book as like his others it's very concise and well written.

My specific gripes are that A) in places he seemed a little too smug and personal about even the smallest flaw in Dawkins / Hitchens arguments. It made me feel a bit uncomfortable as in the spoken debates he cites, the content is not designed to be pulled apart word by word. That's the very nature of spoken debate. It's not

an academic paper where every word is considered before selection.

B) it would have been nice to see some other views on miracles and science other than Hume and C S Lewis. Lennox seemed to have read a lot on Hume and spent a lot of time rebutting his popularist argument that miracles are against nature. Maybe no one else has any different arguments other than Hume's but I don't believe that.

Other than that I felt the book was well reasoned and strongly presented. Disclaimer: I am already a Christian.

Bob says

There are many books on apologetics, & most are well done. However, after reading "Gunning For God" by John Lennox, I confess I like his writing & presentation more than most. His book is very profitable, laid out well, difficult subjects are explained well & illustrated superbly.

Dino Bojadzievski says

The book was a decent read. The author's mathematical thinking does, indeed, make its appearance, and his argumentation is clear. Unfortunately, his lack of oratory abilities gets its appearance, also.

Mark says

Dr Lennox hits the Long Ball!

It can be hazardous to expect to much from a book written by some one you have heard speak once or twice. I expected this book to be an exceptional one based on hearing Dr Lennox speak a couple times. He exceeded my expectation considerably. This book is well worth the time to read and I will likely reread it in the near future.

Mark Lewis says

I discovered Lennox by watching his debates with Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. Based on how well he handled himself, I figured he'd be worth reading. This book, (my first by Lennox) was little more than an apologetic that hit the same topics almost all apologetic works do, and not really adding much to the debate than quoting a bunch of other people who would probably be more rewarding to just read directly.

Kris says

Great specifics organized in a reader-friendly style. I kept picking this one up and putting it down, and every time it always held great ideas for me. I don't agree with Lennox on some details, but for most of this book I was right there with him. And I always love his dry humor!

Matt Lee says

Being a big fan of Lennox in debates with Dawkins et al. already, I was interested to see how his arguments and rhetoric would be shaped to fit the written word. Whilst I prefer his oratory skills, his apologetic arguments are still excellent in prose.

Lennox does a good job for the vast majority of the book to precisely and confidently refute the New Atheists' absurd claims; from contradictory pseudo-scientific statements to ridiculous notions that totally atheist regimes have been 'more moral' on the whole. However, the one thing that prevents this book from getting a 5-star review is that some of his latter points are overly-reliant on the free-will (i.e. sovereign will) of man and a defence overly based on human decision. Whilst the book is not written as a systematic theology on the sovereignty of God and free-will (and perhaps I have mis-interpreted some of Lennox's statements), I still think correct refutations of atheistic logic require correct theology.

Steve says

There is much to like about this book. But there are also some significant problems which means it doesn't really pack the 'debilitating punches' that the description on the book suggests. Firstly, I love a fiery debate. And, while GUNNING FOR GOD does not contain contributions by the so-called "New Atheists", John Lennox has been involved in debates with a number of them. And Lennox's rhetoric in the book is fiery and witty. I enjoyed that aspect of the book. Secondly, many of the points the author makes about the arguments of some of the atheists he is responding to are good. Polemicists like Richard Dawkins and (the late) Christopher Hitchens often offer arguments that are not evidence-based and, particularly in Dawkins' case, appear ignorant of some of the nuances, range and complexity of some Christian beliefs.

There are areas, however, where the book is inadequate. One of these is in the chapter entitled "Can we be good without God?". The answer is obviously "yes". Millions of people live ethical lives without believing in the Christian god (which is what Lennox is debating). The problem with Lennox's approach is that he argues over whether it is possible to have ABSOLUTE moral standards without God. The focus on absolute morality is really a straw man argument because no atheist I know of wants to argue for absolute morality. Most atheist arguments around morality promote the idea of a more pragmatic approach to morality, suggesting that ethical guidelines are required for humanity to live together in ways that promote their well-being. So, in some ways, Lennox's focus on absolute moral standards misses the point.

The last third or so of the book becomes an apologetic for miracles and Christ's resurrection. The best part of this section is Lennox's critique of Hume's arguments against miracles. Very insightful and worthy of consideration. The chapter on the reliability of the New Testament text, the historical reliability of the New Testament Gospels, and the evidence for the resurrection of Christ are pretty much traditional arguments offered by most Christian apologetics and not entirely convincing.

So GUNNING FOR GOD is uneven in its quality from my perspective. It's worth reading for those

interested in the contemporary debates going on between high-profile atheists and high-profile Christian apologetics. But the average reader who is unaware of, or doesn't much care for this debate, probably won't find it of much value.
