



Book Review

The Irrational Atheist

by Vox Day

Ben Bella Books, Dallas, 2008,
305 pages, \$25.00.

“The idea that he is a devotee of reason seeing through the outdated superstitions believed by less intelligent beings is the foremost conceit of the atheist” (p. 7). So starts Vox Day’s demolition job on the various publications of the “New Atheists” in recent years. Perhaps it is a mark of a healthier Christianity that the spate of these polemics has been met with a variety of theological responses (Keller, 2008). But one of the most intriguing and by far the most entertaining is the effort of the self-styled Christian libertarian blogger, Vox Day, a.k.a. Theodore Beale, entitled *The Irrational Atheist*. Aside from the irreverent humor (the book begins with the sentence, “I don’t care if you go to hell”), it is distinct in its narrow approach. The author states early on:

I’m not trying to convince you that God exists. I’m not trying to convince you to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. I’m not even trying to convince you that religious people aren’t lunatics with low IQs who should be regarded with pity and contempt. But I am confident that I will convince you that this trio of New Atheists, this Unholy Trinity, are a collection of faux-intellectual frauds utilizing pseudo-scientific sleight of hand in order to falsely claim that religious faith is inherently dangerous and has no place in the modern world. (p. 7).

And in that narrow goal of making monkeys out of the leading lights of contemporary atheism, Day wildly exceeds his stated expectations. He begins by

distinguishing between “High Church” atheists—the average university professor fits the mold—and “Low Church” atheists, or those that live as if there is no God while not thinking much about it on the way. He professes some sympathy for the latter: “There are far worse creeds to live by than shrug and let live” (p. 23). He also quickly grasps the connection between atheism and contemporary science.

But it is impossible to separate atheism from science, because scientific materialism has such an influence on atheistic thinking even in matters where science is not directly involved. For some atheists, such as Richard Dawkins, science played an important role in causing them to abandon their former faiths but

now serves primarily as a foundation for an ongoing intellectual journey. For others, it is a religion substitute that provides them with purpose and a secular priesthood to whom they look for answers (p. 28).

But he just as quickly notes that these atheists are not so much concerned about science as they are with using it to cloak their outdated Enlightenment values—a distinction that still evades many Christians who compromise with those values because they worry about losing a Christian voice in the sciences. He also takes tongue in cheek to point out that while man has survived millennia of religious belief, he might not survive a few centuries of science, given overpopulation, global warming, etc. Of note, too, is the scientific achievement of “Christian” America, which on a per capita basis exceeds that of the more atheist France by over 28%.

But the book is not specifically about science; it is about the numerous errors of logic and reason exhibited by the new atheists. Day goes right to work on them, beginning with Sam Harris, author of *Letter to a Christian Nation* (2006). Day begins gently (for him), stating that, “Sam Harris is a grave embarrassment to atheism, intellectuals, and the Stanford University philosophy department” (p. 113). He goes on to cite a dozen factual and logical errors in detail, before zeroing in on Harris’s most popular argument that in spite of Christian morality, crime is more prevalent in cities in “Red States” (read Christian) than in “Blue States” (read atheist) in America. Day uses census data on the county level and FBI statistics to demonstrate that Harris is not only wrong but also draws conclusions exactly the opposite of what the data really show—there is a good correlation of urban crime and unbelief. As with most of his criticisms of the new atheists, Day is not content to put a stake through the heart of the argument, but he goes on to disperse the ashes of the cremated corpse on the winds of reason,

logic, and science. He does the same to Harris’s dishonest attempt to lay the genocide of modern (atheist) communist regimes off on religious belief and digs deeply enough to show that Harris does so because of his own nonrational prejudice against faith.

Day then turns to Richard Dawkins, whom he labels “Darwin’s Judas.” In his usual understated style, he begins the chapter saying, “Scientists should come with a sell by date” (p. 135), explaining that whatever positive contributions Dawkins made to science are long past. He sums up the English don’s error succinctly: “In *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins is using his reputation as a famous Darwinian scientist to sell a propagandistic vision that is directly opposed to that very science as well as the religions it purports to attack” (pp. 136–137). And that is Day’s contribution to combating the rants of Dawkins—pointing out that he never actually gets around to using the science that he so vigorously trumpets.

While Dawkins incessantly complains about the lack of evidence for God, he never quite gets around to explaining precisely what proof, presumably scientific, would be sufficient for him. He poses no potentially falsifiable experiment that would suffice to prove or disprove God’s existence nor does he even consider the question of whether any such experiment would conceivably be possible (p. 139).

Day goes on to provide a list of empirical hypotheticals to falsify Christianity, just to prove that it could have been easily done by Dawkins, had he any objective interest in doing so. He then goes on to list seven beliefs of Dawkins that require no less faith than religion, such as the idea that science inspires art or that Catholicism is more damaging to children than sexual abuse. Day supplies scientific evidence to refute all. Then he goes after Dawkins’s attempts at mathematics. As a computer game designer,

he is more familiar with the applicable math than Dawkins and demonstrates it in short order, once again to Dawkins’s embarrassment. Finally, after wrecking Dawkins’s “skyhook” argument that tries to circumvent the anthropic principle, Day concludes, “But if science cannot inspire great art, never let it be said that a scientist cannot inspire great comedy” (p. 158).

Next on the list of victims is Christopher Hitchens. Day damns with faint praise:

However, his book, *god is not Great*, has the virtue of being presented to the reader in a commendably honest and straightforward manner. Hitchens is not marketing humanism with a scientific brand, he is not pushing for global government under the guise of godlessness, he is merely venting about his personal hatred for religion in general and Christianity in particular (p. 161).

Day praises Hitchens’s vast experience and literary talent, but notes that “he is subject to the common journalistic misconception that the plural of anecdote is data (p. 162). In other words, Hitchens is a great storyteller but not much on logical argumentation. For example, he cannot explain why anyone should accept evolving morality as the basis for any moral judgment. He notes that Hitchens is not as upset as Dawkins about creationism, because

unlike Dawkins, Hitchens does not sell DVDs marketed to schools and libraries from his Web site, or more likely because the highly literate Hitchens recognizes that it does not matter if school children who cannot read or do arithmetic are taught that they were created by natural selection, God, or space aliens (p. 166).

Not content to let things go at that point, Day provides a table of 51 assertions made by Hitchens that are presented without supporting evidence and are often self-refuting. Then he

zeroes in on Hitchens's four big reasons for rejecting God.

If these four objections are truly the basis for Hitchens' hostility toward God and religion, then the irrepressible atheist may be much closer to returning to the faith of his fathers than anyone suspects, because one of these objections is trivial, one is irrelevant, and the other two are simply wrong (p. 173).

Next on the menu is Daniel Dennett, the author of *Breaking the Spell* (2007) and *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (1995). Day begins by apologizing for lumping him with the others but then proceeds to illustrate a series of logical errors that lead one to conclude that he is going easier on Dennett only because he is more civil than Dawkins and more thoughtful than Harris.

The occasional logical errors and assertions in the face of evidence such as these show that while *Breaking the Spell* is unquestionably superior in almost every way to the Unholy Trinity's four books on religion, the scientific-sounding speculation that fills it is nothing more than that, speculation. The literary editor of *The New Republic* underlined this point in an utterly brutal review of the book that appeared in the *New York Times*, reminding the reader that at the end of the day, *Breaking the Spell* is not science, but a book of speculative philosophy written by a science fetishist (p. 186).

But Day, in the end, offers praise for Dennett's offer of a rapprochement of inquiry into the truth of both science and religion, claiming that no serious Christian can refuse that offer, nor should one be afraid of searching for truth in God's world.

After finishing with Dennett, Day turns his guns on Michael Onfray, a radical French philosopher who is as well known in Europe as he is unknown in America. Day starts gently: "Like so many French philosophers of the recent

past, Onfray's primary use for Occam's razor is to repeatedly slash his own throat" (p. 198). But despite the fact that his book, *Treatise on Atheology* (2005), was panned by an Italian reviewer, who said, "I don't know if the idea is more silly or ignorant," Day appreciates Onfray's honesty.

Onfray performs the invaluable task of demonstrating that atheism possesses the inherent potential to be every bit as unrepentantly evil by traditional Western moral standards as Christians have always believed it to be. . . . For Michel Onfray demands nothing less than an atheological *auto da fé*, burning Western civilization on the fiery stake of a New Luciferian Enlightenment. This would not be worrisome if it were only more inane insanity on the part of a French philosopher, the problem is that Onfray's proposed new order is not merely the logical extension of the secular utopia sought by Russell, Dawkins, and Harris, it is the stark rational articulation of that which the New Atheists do not dare to admit, either to themselves or to the reading public (pp. 199, 207).

That is because Onfray detests Christian values as much as Christian religion, selectively ignoring the terrors of modern atheism while blaming all of society's ills on the Catholic Church. Generally, it sounds as though the philosopher has more than a few loose screws.

According to Onfray, the New Atheist path leads only to Nietzschean nihilism: his *Atheology* is post-Nietzschean, leading humanity beyond the dialectic of nihilistic struggle and into a hedonistic philosopher's paradise (p. 206).

After dealing with the exponents of the new atheism, Day tackles some of the traditional accusations against Christianity, including the Inquisition, the Crusades, Hitler-was-a-closet-Christian, etc. He deftly turns the argument around, displaying knowledge of military

history and history in general that the atheists seem to have missed in their zeal for science. In his chapter, "The Red Hand of Atheism," Day documents, in more detail than needed, the evils that seem to crop up whenever atheism takes root. Following up, he briefly refutes ten common arguments used by atheists today.

Despite some theological arguments that can be settled over a beer in heaven (or whatever we'll be drinking there), Day's book is a solid logical and scientific refutation of those who extol themselves as exponents of science and reason. That is its greatest strength—intellectual judo at its finest. Of course, the chuckle-per-page writing style doesn't hurt either. Although some see atheism, old or new, as being tangential to arguments about origins, it is at the core of the various forms of Enlightenment science and post-Enlightenment philosophy that we fight on a regular basis. It doesn't hurt either that Day offers the book on his blogspot as a free pdf download. I heartily recommend it.

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