

BOOK REVIEW

of

Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker,
Answering the New Atheism: Dismantling Dawkins' Case Against God,
Emmaus Road Publishing, 2008.

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This review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

This opening paragraph is essentially the same as for a previous review of a response to the New Atheism, but I think it is worthy of being repeated. I don't suppose it was their intention, but the writings of the New Atheists have spawned a wealth of Christian responses that is truly impressive. It is as if a door has been opened for Christians to make a new and fresh presentation of the claims of Christianity to the modern world. No doubt the New Atheists would disagree, but in my opinion there is a stark contrast between the writings of the New Atheists and the best of the Christian responses, in the Christians' favor. This book by Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker is a good example of one of the better Christian responses. One of the remarkable contrasts is clearly demonstrated here. Hahn and Wiker make a very compelling presentation by those who are very well informed and who have clearly thought deeply about the subjects addressed in this volume. This book may never achieve the financial success of, say, *The God Delusion*, but those who genuinely wish an intelligent discussion of issues raised by the New Atheists will find this book to be a very good read.

Scott Hahn received his B.A. degree with a triple-major in Theology, Philosophy and Economics from Grove City College, Pennsylvania, in 1979, his M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 1982, and his Ph.D. in Biblical Theology from Marquette University in 1995. He has ten years of youth and pastoral ministry experience in Protestant congregations (in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Massachusetts, Kansas and Virginia) and is a former Professor of Theology at Chesapeake Theological Seminary. He was ordained in 1982 at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Fairfax, Virginia. He entered the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil, 1986. He is currently a Professor of Theology and Scripture at Franciscan University of Steubenville, where he has taught since 1990, and is the founder and director of the Saint Paul Center for Biblical Theology.

Benjamin Wiker received his Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University, and has taught at Marquette

University, St. Mary's University, Thomas Aquinas College, and Franciscan University. He is a senior fellow with the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology and with the Discovery Institute. He is the author of several books, including, *Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists*, InterVarsity Press, 2002, and, along with Jonathan Witt, *A Meaningful World: How the Arts and Sciences Reveal the Genius of Nature*, IVP Academic, 2006. He is now a full-time writer.

The book under review is relatively short, having about 150 pages, and contains an Introduction and eight chapters:

Chapter 1 is titled *Dawkins' god, Chance*.

Chapter 2 is titled *Pride and Prejudice*.

Chapter 3 is titled *Dawkins' Fallacious Philosophy*.

Chapter 4 is *Can God's Existence Be Demonstrated?*

Chapter 5 is *The Problem of Morality*.

Chapter 6 is *Dawkins' Morality*.

Chapter 7 is *Dawkins Dismantled*.

Chapter 8 is *King Richard*.

In the Introduction, Hahn and Wiker introduce their book and discuss Dawkins' book *The God Delusion* in general. They think that a Christian response, such as theirs, is in order, but indicate Dawkins really is not a worthy opponent. For example, they write as follows on page 3: "Dawkins' *God Delusion* is rather disappointing, and we are not alone in that assessment. Both Christians and atheists, non-scientists and scientists, have panned it. Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga warns readers that 'one shouldn't look to this book for even-handed and thoughtful commentary. In fact the proportion of insult, ridicule, mockery, spleen, and vitriol is astounding.'" The quotation of Plantinga is from "The Dawkins Confusion: *Naturalism 'ad absurdum'*," *Books and Culture*, on the web at <http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2007/marapr/1.21.html>

In Chapter 1, Hahn and Wiker point out, and discuss, the fundamental flaw in Dawkins' thinking when it comes to the existence of God. In my view, this is very illuminating, and if one had read and absorbed this book by Hahn and Wiker prior to reading

Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, it would help one significantly in understanding Dawkins. I had not read Hahn and Wiker first, and I suspect my reaction was similar to what many others likely had: something was fundamentally wrong with Dawkins' approach, but to be specific about what was wrong may have been difficult to state. The fundamental flaw is that Dawkins hates God so much that he has a religious zeal against Him, and that this zeal leads him into materialistic irrationalism. The opening sentence in Chapter 1 is as follows: "We're going to begin with an exposure of Richard Dawkins' faith in a particularly strange anti-deity, which for Dawkins functions as his god, the object of his faith, hope, and dare we say, if not love, considerable devotion." That god is Chance. On page 11, Hahn and Wiker write as follows: "his irrational belief in the powers of chance, a belief that has its origins in his intense desire that God not exist. . . . This is a fundamental confusion that runs throughout Dawkins, the confusion of improbability with impossibility." Hahn and Wiker continue on page 13: "Dawkins believes that *anything but* a miracle is possible, and that leads him to believe that the impossible, no matter how absurd, is possible. . . . Dawkins' presentation of the miraculous and the impossible is only a manifestation of his atheism."

Hahn and Wiker develop these thoughts by stressing that probability, when it comes to arguments, has little if anything to do with mathematical probabilities. On page 15 they write as follows: "We may have probable arguments for His [God's] necessary existence or against it, in the same way that we can have probable arguments about the current existence of liquid water on a certain planet outside our solar system. In both cases, the fact exists – either God does or doesn't exist; either there is or is not liquid water – and the probability has to do with the type and caliber of *our* arguments given what we happen to know at the point we make them." Probability has to do with our arguments, not with the facts. This seems to be something that Dawkins fails to realize. In Dawkins' view, given enough time anything is possible, except, of course, a miracle. Hahn and Wiker give an example on page 18: "If the spontaneous arising of DNA is simply impossible, then it wouldn't matter how many billions or trillions of planets there were. It couldn't and wouldn't happen. Thus, we have to be very wary that Dawkins is not assuming that what is impossible is just very, very unlikely."

In Chapter 2, Hahn and Wiker continue their discussion of Dawkins' god, Chance. On pages 30 and 31 they write: "And so, for DNA to exist as information, there must be a cell in which it can

function as information. But here's the catch. The cell isn't made of DNA. The cell itself is made of proteins (and proteins of amino acids), and it is the vast array of protein structures and protein-based activities that allow the genetic code of DNA to 'come to life.' . . . Thus, we are faced with what in origin of life studies is called the chicken and the egg problem. A cell needs both DNA and protein to function; getting them both and getting them integrated stretches the bounds of probability to the breaking point. . . . Dawkins assures the reader, 'we know it happened on Earth because we are here.' *That* is not an argument. It is, at best, an assumption dressed up as a demonstration. One could just as well demonstrate that fairies create life for 'we know it happened on Earth because we are here.'" Dawkins sidesteps the real question of how did life actually begin. Hahn and Wiker explain on page 46 as follows: "It seems to us, at least, that as long as Dawkins thinks he can give some kind of an explanation by chance, he seems satisfied in thinking that it *must* have happened that way. But that would be a fundamental error. You *can* give an explanation for some event or entity as merely the result of chance (say, Austin's novel or a Shakespearean sonnet), in the same way that you could give a Marxist or Freudian explanation for it. But the real question should always be, all theology aside, *how did it actually happen?*"

In Chapter 4, Hahn and Wiker give their own argument for the existence of God. Please note that it is an argument, not a proof, even though Hahn and Wiker do refer to it as a proof. A proof for *anything* is hard to come by. In logic, given a premise or two, something else logically follows, and therefore that something else has been proved, but only if the one that the logical development is offered to agrees with the premise or two. This sort of thing is done in philosophy and mathematics where certain axioms, which can serve as premises, are generally agreed upon. But when it comes to the existence of God, His existence is more of an axiom than a conclusion. What can be more basic than the existence of God. Proving God's existence would be more like attempting to prove the correctness of one of the axioms in mathematics, rather than something else that follows from it. To develop this further, Gordon Clark in his book *A Christian View of Men and Things: An Introduction to Philosophy*, Baker Book House, 1981, writes as follows on page 29: "All arguments seem doubtful. And what is worse, as the student makes his way through the mazes of speculation, he begins to see that even though some sequences of thought are logically valid, they all depend on original assumptions. Just as the theorems of geometry are deduced from the axioms, so the

conclusions of behaviorism are deduced from the assumption that the mind is a physiological process, utilitarianism from the assumption that pleasure is the good, and gravitation from the theory of space and time. But what about these assumptions or axioms? Can they be proved? It would seem that they cannot, for they are the starting points of an argument, and if the argument starts with them, there is no preceding argumentation. Accordingly, after the humanist or theist has worked out a consistent system by arranging all his propositions as theorems in a series of valid demonstrations, how is either of them to persuade the other to accept his unproved axioms?" This is not meant to be discouraging. Rather, it is meant to be realistic about proving something, or at least making a valid argument for it. The beginning point is where the two parties in an argument can agree. If you agree with the beginning points in Hahn and Wiker's argument, and with their development, then you may agree with their conclusion as well.

At the beginning of Chapter 4, on page 75, Hahn and Wiker express their doubts about Dawkins agreeing with their argument: "We have not offered a proof of God's existence ourselves. Is there such a proof? Is there such a proof to which even Dawkins *himself* would have to assent? The answer is yes and no. In that order. Yes, there is a proof, and no, it would not be likely to convince Dawkins himself, and the reason is that Mr. Dawkins is not rational enough." Hahn and Wiker develop their argument from the very capable human brain and the ability for humans to reason far beyond any evolutionary benefit that could come from it. This easily follows from the Christian teaching found in the Bible that humans, and humans alone, at least here on earth, were created in the image of God. But to a person with a materialistic philosophy, such as Dawkins, what evidence can be presented? Hahn and Wiker make the attempt. On page 80 they state, as others have as well: "there is no necessary connection between natural selection and truth: a materially-determined brain state (whether we regard it as determined by physical laws or natural selection) is just that, a materially-determined brain state. . . . The only connection that we could reasonably make is that certain beliefs prove to be helpful in regard to survival." However, in terms of evolutionary development, what possible value for survival could philosophy and scientific theory have? Does philosophy and scientific theory actually contain, or reveal, truth? If they do, how could evolutionary theory, or materialistic philosophy in general, possibly explain this? If philosophical and scientific theory did not correlate with the natural world, then we could,

perhaps, dismiss such theorizing as useless musings. If such theorizing came after physical observations, we could perhaps also think that the theories were just useful tools. But what if, and this is indeed the case, that frequently the theories long predate the physical usefulness of the theories? Does this not suggest to most reasonable men and women that the theories do indeed contain, or reveal, truth? No proof here, but these are some good arguments nonetheless.

Hahn and Wiker write as follows on pages 86 and 87: "The really strange thing is that Euclid's [lived around 300 BC] entirely abstract intellectual work became the foundation for the greatest advances in modern science precisely because there was a profound correlation between his geometrical and mathematical methods of reasoning and nature itself. No one who has put Euclid's *Elements* and Isaac Newton's *Principia* (the full title of which is *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*) side by side can doubt that. The correlation between the *logos* of geometry and the *logos* of nature, between Euclid's geometry and the multitude of laws and relationships discovered by Newton, was so astounding that for at least three centuries afterward God was popularly recast as a Master Geometer. . . . If nature had been randomly contrived, how could an originally abstract intellectual field of learning lead centuries later to countless scientific discoveries, the advances of which were made possible in great part by the prior advances in the purely intellectual mathematical disciplines? It can't be that the human mind happens to have evolved entirely abstract capabilities far exceeding any immediate benefit, and done so 2000 years prior to their application in understanding nature."

In my view, the argument made for the existence of God by Hahn and Wiker, and that we are made in His image, is compelling. It provides a rational basis not only for God's existence, but for human beings having a mind and a soul, that we do indeed make choices, that we are not automatons, and that we are responsible for our actions. We can, however, augment the above argument and make it even stronger, by adding to it the moral argument for God's existence. This differs from the above, but it is related in that the evidence is found within us. Probably the most well known moral argument is by C. S. Lewis in "Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe," in *Mere Christianity*, Macmillan, 1967 (many printings available). These concepts are further developed by J. Budziszewski in *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (InterVarsity Press, 1997), *The Revenge of Conscience: Politics and the Fall of Man* (Spence Publishing, 1999), *What We Can't Not Know: A Guide*

(Spence Publishing, 2003), and *The Line Through the Heart: Natural Law as Fact, Theory, and Sign of Contradiction* (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009).

I think we could also augment the above argument and make it even stronger, by adding to it external evidences for design in the natural world. This differs from the above. The argument put forward by Hahn and Wiker, and also by the moral argument, is evidence from within, that is, having to do with the basic nature of being human and what it means. If we add external evidences for design in the natural world then that would add an additional element, a different and independent line of evidence, for the existence of God. The classic example of this would be the famous book by William Paley, *Natural Theology or Evidence of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, collected from the appearances of nature*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Matthew D. Eddy and David Knight, Oxford University Press (Oxford World's Classics), 2008. Paley's book was published in 1802. The editing and notes by Eddy and Knight help the modern reader follow Paley's argument. There has been a resurgence of interest in design in nature in recent years, giving rise to the modern Intelligent Design movement, the results of which adds significantly to that offered by Paley. A few recent books on intelligent design are as follows: Fazale Rana, *The Cell's Design: How Chemistry Reveals the Creator's Artistry* (BakerBooks, 2008), Werner Gitt, *In the Beginning was Information: A Scientist Explains the Incredible Design in Nature* (Master Books, 2007), William A. Dembski and Jonathan Wells, *The Design of Life: Discovering Signs of Intelligence in Biological Systems* (Foundation for Thought and Ethics, 2008), Benjamin Wiker and Jonathan Witt, *A Meaningful World: How the Arts and Sciences Reveal the Genius of Nature* (IVP Academic, 2006).

In my opinion, Hahn and Wiker's argument for the existence of God, by itself, is quite compelling. Phillip Johnson, in a speech given at Princeton University in 1995, made a similar argument in an abbreviated form (*Can Science Know the Mind of God?*, video tape, Access Research Network, 1996), but not as well developed as done by Hahn and Wiker. As indicated above, when augmented by the moral argument for the existence of God, and also by the design argument, then I think the burden is upon those who claim that they are not convinced to give some sort of response to these compelling arguments. Combined they present a reasoned presentation for what most find intuitive, and the arguments make sense of what we observe within ourselves and in the world around us.

In Chapters 6 and 7, Hahn and Wiker discuss Dawkins' claim that not only can an atheist be moral, but that atheists are typically more moral than are Christians, even though Dawkins embraces what he thinks is the morality of Jesus. Hahn and Wiker point out Dawkins' confusion on this subject, and how Dawkins' morality is not justified by his commitment to evolution and his God, Chance. They point out Dawkins' lack of consistency when he claims moral superiority as follows on page 119: "But then where and how *does* Dawkins ground morality? With what we've seen so far, he appears to have placed himself in a difficult situation. He posits an amoral universe – one without intrinsic good and evil – precisely because no God exists. But if Dawkins wants to condemn Christians for immorality – *really* wants to condemn them – then it would seem that he must accept a moral universe, which would in turn demand a deity (since the lack of a deity is what characterizes it as amoral). Providing an evolutionary account of morality does not help his case either. As we have seen, the principle of natural selection is fundamental and amoral, and morality is simply one more thing that must be explained by evolution."

Dawkins is famous for his condemnation of the God of the Old Testament as immoral. Hahn and Wiker point out on page 122 how the very charges that Dawkins brings against God can also be said about evolution, which is Dawkins' fundamental allegiance: "Yet now another, more amusing problem arises. It would seem that a good many of the complaints made by Dawkins against the God of the Old Testament could, with equal justice, be made against natural selection itself. That is, the very complaints that bring him to reject the Old Testament are the ones that brought him to reject Darwinism itself as a moral foundation and guide. To say the least, he puts himself in a paradoxical position. . . . What would evolution look like if we tried to deify evolution's principles? Would the Evolution God (EG) be 'unjust' in its callous indifference 'to all suffering,' and supremely so, for continually picking off the weak and sickly? Would EG be an 'unforgiving control-freak,' 'megalomaniacal,' and 'petty' since (as Darwin stated), 'It may metaphorically be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing, throughout the world, the slightest variations; rejecting those that are bad, preserving and adding up all that are good; silently and insensibly working, *whenever and wherever opportunity offers*, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life'? Would EG be 'sodomasochistic' in its use of suffering, destruction, and death as the means to create

new forms of life? A ‘capriciously and malevolent bully’ in his ‘lacking all purpose’ and being ‘callous’? A ‘bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser,’ ‘genocidal,’ and ‘racist’ in his continually pitting one species population against another in severe struggle, the struggles among humans taking place between tribe and tribe, race and race? And what adjective would describe EG, who uses these deadly struggles as the very vehicle responsible for the upward climb of human evolution? So we’ve rejected the God of the Old Testament for Dawkins’ atheistic account of evolution, only to find out that many of the traits Dawkins marked as repugnant are enclosed in natural selection . . .”

On page 125 they continue: “Again, we remind ourselves that Dawkins explicitly denies that we should use Darwin’s *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*, or his own *Selfish Gene*, as moral guidebooks. But now we realize that, oddly enough, the *Origin*, *Descent*, and *Selfish Gene* stand in the same position as the Bible (or at least the Old Testament) for Dawkins: *none of them* should be used for moral guidelines, and for much the same reasons.”

On page 128 Hahn and Wiker write as follows: “This gives us the answer to our question, where does Dawkins get *his* independent moral criteria? He picks and chooses them from evolution, or more accurately, from Dawkins himself, as can be seen in his attempt to pick and choose from evolution those moral traits that he himself for some reason finds congenial: kindness, altruism, generosity, empathy, pity, and compassion. We assume all these go together to make up ‘super niceness.’” Dawkins admits that morality cannot be based on evolution *per se*, but that we should rise above our evolutionary propensities and embrace goodness. We should deny the selfish gene within, exercise our control over it, and become better people.

Hahn and Wiker delight in making the comparison with human sin, and write as follows on pages 131 and 132: “Dawkins seems to be a sane evolutionist. As he says in ‘Atheists for Jesus,’ [posted online April 2006, at <http://richarddawkins.net/articles/20>] we need to ‘lead society away from the nether regions of its Darwinian origins into kinder and more compassionate uplands.’ Yet, such sanity leads to further irony. The parallels between Dawkins and the Christians he berates seem all too evident, even though Dawkins misses or ignores them. Both believe that nature is somehow ‘fallen,’ not what it ‘should be,’ and Dawkins (despite his horror at the notion) even has a quasi-equivalent concept of original sin, the selfish gene, that (just as St. Augustine said of original sin) is passed on through procreation. Both depend upon primary texts that act as revelations upon which

everything else must build (Darwin’s *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*, and the Old Testament), and both look for a super-natural (above-natural) purification of what pertains in the original revelations and in nature (super niceness over Darwinian natural selection and Christ’s transformation of the old law and the old nature in the New Testament). Both look at Christ as exemplary, although Dawkins avers that ‘I think we owe Jesus the honour of separating his genuinely original and radical ethics from the supernatural nonsense which he inevitably espoused as a man of his time.’ But even with these important similarities to Christianity in general and Jesus in particular, one may well wonder if there really is some deep, underlying vision that Dawkins shares with Christianity and Christ. The vision of ‘super niceness,’ which he believes that Jesus generally supported and would support even more fervently if only he had lived to be Richard Dawkins, . . . In this *geist* Dawkins places all his hopes for the future. But just how moral is this *geist*?”

Dawkins apparently wants to be moral, but he claims that neither the Bible nor evolution provides any basis for morality. So here is the rub. It is good to say that you advocate kindness, altruism, generosity, empathy, pity, and compassion, but what do these mean in practice? When it comes to actually being moral, we need practical instruction on specific things, and just where do we get that needed instruction? Dawkins does not appear to have anything but his own preferences. Hahn and Wiker suggest a test case on basic human rights. Human rights is a subject that will reveal the differences between world views. A good introduction to the subject is offered by Thomas K. Johnson in his book, *Human Rights: A Christian Primer*, Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2008. The test case that Hahn and Wiker suggests, is the value of human life itself: infanticide, abortion, and euthanasia. How does Christian morality and the type of morality that Dawkins proposes compare on these subjects?

Hahn and Wiker indicate that there is no question as to what the Bible teaches on these subjects. On page 135 they write as follows: “From very early on, Christianity has been adamantly against abortion and infanticide, as one of the earliest non-New Testament documents, the *Didache*, unambiguously attests. ‘You shall not slaughter a child in abortion nor slay a begotten one.’ This prohibition was obviously part of the general prohibition, ‘Do not kill.’ Further, as we noted above, the prohibition itself was rooted in the biblical understanding that all human beings were created in the image of God. . . . Dawkins asks rhetorically, ‘given that the embryo lacks a nervous

system, shouldn't the mother's well-developed nervous system have the choice?' And late term abortions? Well, reasons Dawkins, if late-term aborted embryos suffer, 'it is not because they are *human* that they suffer.' Indeed, no embryo at any age would seem to suffer more than a cow or sheep embryo at the same stage of development. And in fact, claims Dawkins, adult cows and sheep in the slaughterhouse certainly suffer more than any embryo, human or not." In other words, Dawkins the materialist and evolutionist, sees no qualitative difference between humans and beasts because he lacks the conviction that humans were created in the image of God. The Bible makes this difference; Dawkins and presumably others like him, do not.

On page 137, Hahn and Wiker write: "Dawkins, too, is quite clear in his advocacy of euthanasia, . . . He seems to make it morally acceptable as a personal decision about one's own life. The problem is that the person loudly proclaiming the right to put himself out of his own misery will soon enough, like Singer, claim the right to put others out of their misery as well. This is not an empty prophecy. In the Netherlands, the legalization of euthanasia quickly led to the involuntary euthanasia of the elderly, the sick, and infants."

Practical morality, as indicated above, is based upon fundamental convictions as to who we are as human beings, and that can make a world of difference. Hahn and Wiker write as follows on page 138: "Such is the ambiguous nature of 'super niceness' blown in Dawkins' *zeitgeist*. It shows us why the list of moral

traits – kindness, altruism, generosity, empathy, pity, and compassion – espoused by Dawkins are at best vague and, at worst, entirely misleading for most people who read his book." On page 140, they write as follows: "We have already seen Dawkins' unqualified affirmation of abortion and euthanasia, and the evolutionist Singer's approval of infanticide and bestiality. Can Christians take seriously Dawkins' statement that they have nothing to fear concerning the moral implications of evolution?"

In this review, I have focused on what I think are the three main contributions of Hahn and Wiker in this book: chance, the existence of God, and morality. Dawkins believes in the infinite power of chance. Hahn and Wiker rightly understand the difference between the probability of arguments and mathematical probability. Dawkins does not believe in God. Hahn and Wiker give compelling reasons to believe in God. Dawkins claims moral superiority over Christians. Hahn and Wiker demonstrate that Dawkins and Christians, while using similar moral words, have very different ways of practically applying moral principles because they have very different fundamental convictions upon which they are based.

It is one thing to read Dawkins and simply disagree with him. It is quite another thing to articulate where and why you disagree with him. Hahn and Wiker have done an excellent job of articulating their differences with Dawkins. This is certainly, in my opinion, one of the better, if not the best response to Dawkins' *The God Delusion*.