

## BOOK REVIEW

of

Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath,  
*The Dawkins Delusion?: Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*,  
IVP Books, 2007.

This book is in the Evangel Library,  
and this review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

If you've seen the documentary movie *Expelled* by Ben Stein, you may recall the interview of atheist Richard Dawkins by Ben Stein. At one point Dawkins, with his book in hand *The God Delusion*, quotes from the book his diatribe against the Old Testament God. Stein also interviews Alister McGrath in the documentary, although it is of shorter length, where McGrath opposes Dawkins' point of view. This current book review is of the book by Alister McGrath and his wife Joanna, which is a response to Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*, Mariner Books, 2008 (the original hardback book was published in 2006). Since the McGraths' book is a response to Dawkins' book I felt that I surely needed to read the latter also, which I did. Both books are in the Evangel Library. Therefore this review is of both books. I didn't put Dawkins' book at the top of this review because of its offensive title and content. However, I have more to write about the Dawkins' book than about the McGraths', due in part because Dawkins' book is much longer, but more so because of the enormous popularity of Dawkins' book.

The things stated in Dawkins' book can not be dismissed as those of some crackpot, those of somebody on the lunatic fringe. A friend of mine refuses to believe that such ideas are main stream, but I believe that they are, at least in academia. As evidence, consider this: (1) Richard Dawkins holds a very distinguished position at Oxford University—the Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science. (2) Dawkins' book is on the New York Times Bestseller list. (3) Dawkins' book was selected as the best book of the year by *The Economist*, *Financial Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Salon*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Capital Times*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and others. (4) It has been endorsed by *Scientific American* with these words – “Dawkins is frequently dismissed as a bully, but he is only putting theological doctrines to the same kind of scrutiny that any scientific theory must withstand.” (5) *The Nation* has endorsed Dawkins' book with these words – “A lively writer . . . an entertaining read . . . Dawkins's outrage at the persistence of medieval ideas in the modern era is warranted. In fact, it's overdue.” (6) *New York* magazine has endorsed Dawkins' book with these words – “A surprisingly elegant and gracious conclusion, depicting science as exactly the kind of glorious expansion of our perceptions that we once thought only God could provide.” (7) *New York Times Book Review* writes of Dawkins' book – “Lots of good, hard-hitting stuff about the imbecilities of religious fanatics and frauds of all stripes.” (8) Dawkins has received numerous awards and accolades for his numerous publications. (9) As reported in the McGrath's book, Dawkins was recently voted one of the world's three leading intellectuals. Clearly not everyone agrees with Dawkins' statements about religion, but he simply must be recognized as expressing the sentiments of a large number of people. If we can believe Stein in *Expelled*, he represents a majority of those in power in academic institutions.

Dawkins is a good and entertaining writer. Early on in the book I thought it might be interesting to have a conversation with him. Not that I am an apologist, but I thought maybe he was just grossly misinformed. By the time I finished the book I had become convinced that he is probably not misinformed at all, but has a genuine hatred of God and all things religious. Given the popularity of this book, and all of the awards and accolades that he has received for it, it may seem strange to say but it is a surprisingly superficial book. Claims are made throughout the book with absolutely no evidence given in support of the claim, not so much as a reference to someone else. The book is not well organized and he in places rambles on about personal thoughts and experiences where it is not clear how any of it adds to his “argument” (the book is mostly devoid of anything that could be called an argument). So how do we account for the book's popularity – or the popularity of the writer for that matter? Simply, I think, that many agree with him and rejoice at seeing their hatred for God in print!

The McGrath's acknowledge that there isn't a lot worthy of a response in Dawkins' book. However, they fear that if no response is given that many would simply think that Christians have no response to offer. The result is that their book is much shorter than Dawkins' since they only respond where they think they have gleaned something to respond to. The McGraths write that “Dawkins simply offers the atheist equivalent of slick hellfire preaching, substituting turbocharged rhetoric and highly selective manipulation of facts for careful, evidence-based thinking. Curiously, there is surprisingly little scientific analysis in *The God Delusion*.” “Is the case for atheism really so weak that it has to be bolstered by such half-baked nonsense?” Actually, that is an important point. This book by Dawkins should provide us with a certain sense of confidence. Is this the best that they can do? They send out their champion, their Goliath, and this is it! Shouldn't we be able to expect more? One little stone? That's all it takes?

However, the McGraths do attempt to take Dawkins seriously and respond as best they can. One of their criticisms is that “One of the most characteristic features of Dawkins's antireligious polemic is to present the pathological as if it were normal, the fringe as if it were the center, crackpots as if they were mainstream.”

Actually, if I might be so bold, I think the McGraths have missed Dawkins' soft underbelly. Dawkins' book is very antireligious but it is also very pro-evolution. In fact, Dawkins' own atheistic religion is based on evolution writ large. What if the theory of evolution could be scientifically challenged, as, for example, the *Expelled* documentary suggests? Then Dawkins' religion comes tumbling down. In his book he links everything positive to Darwinian evolution. His whole life revolves around it. If the findings of intelligent design theorists pan out, and if the number of scientists in general find the theory of evolution as having questionable evidence at best, then what of Dawkins' religion? At the least we should find all of this interesting: it is certainly a big part of what is going on in our world.