

Book Review – *The Dawkins Delusion?*, Alister McGrath with Joanna Collicutt McGrath, 2007

This is a timely book that was needed to expose some of the nonsense that Richard Dawkins has put forward in his book *The God Delusion*. It is to be recommended if you struggle with some of the arguments that Dawkins has raised and the force with which they are presented. McGrath is a former atheist himself, which gives him some credibility in his critique. There is probably no better positioned person of religious faith to do so (and he is ably assisted by his wife, Joanna Collicutt McGrath). This book provides a rational and well thought through counter to the dangerous atheistic fundamentalism that Dawkins postulates and that sadly follows the lead of religious fundamentalism over so many years. McGrath does not however go into the detail of rebutting each of Dawkins' arguments. Instead, he shows them up as a whole by exposing the fact that Dawkins' reasoning (or lack of), as well as his arguments, are deeply flawed. There is really no need for any thinking person to repudiate, in detail, the nonsense put forward by Dawkins such as the idea that all religion is evil and that it is a form of child abuse to subject your children to a religious upbringing. These are just some of the arguments with which Dawkins has tried to influence his readers.

Having said that however, I could not help feeling that McGrath could have done a better job at bridging the gap between atheism and religious faith. I believe it is important to realise that atheists have more in common with believers than many people think (a strong sense of faith being the main one example). We can continue to have pot-shots at each other from each side of the fence, but I don't think we are going to come any closer to real dialogue until we find the things we have in common. I believe McGrath makes the mistake of being a little too smug in his critique of Dawkins' book, a trait that is all too common among us Christians.

However, there is more to praise than be critical about in this book. It would have been easy to respond to the arguments and style of Dawkins with equal viciousness and counter-argument, to the point where both sides just end up being more entrenched in their views than ever. McGrath does not fall into that trap, instead displaying a balanced and reasoned response in exposing the profound flaws in Dawkins' reasoning.

Finally, I echo McGrath's fear that through *The God Delusion*, Dawkins may recruit people to his cause who are persuaded by the sheer force with which his case is argued. However this is balanced by the real possibility that many people will simply see through what McGrath describes as the 'crude stereotypes, vastly oversimplified binary oppositions ('science is good, religion is bad'), straw men, and seemingly pathological hostility towards religion' that Dawkins displays. McGrath does a commendable job in leading the way for thinking people to do just that.

by Nils von Kalm
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