

Conclusions

This book, written by authors who are upfront about their atheistic evolutionary viewpoint, presents an interesting challenge to the idea that natural selection is a major mechanism for evolution. The authors are refreshingly honest about their assumptions and make many insightful comments. In many ways their style is entertaining and enjoyable. Although they make it clear they do not agree with creation or intelligent design, they do not resort to the usual cheap shots on these. Instead they focus on issues relevant to natural selection.

This book can be a challenging read since the authors pulled from many diverse fields. However, I consider it valuable for someone who really wants to understand natural selection. There are certainly many additional points one could discuss related to how natural selection, even within the creation model, is seriously misunderstood and overrated. Still, this book provides a decent introduction to many of the issues involved.

References

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2. Lightner, J.K., Genetics of Coat Color I: The Melanocortin 1 Receptor (MC1R), *ARJ* **1**:109–116, 2008; and Lightner, J.K., Gene duplications and nonrandom mutations in the family Cercopithecidae: evidence for designed mechanisms driving adaptive genomic mutations, *CRSQ* **46**(1):1–5, 2009.
3. Endler, J.A., *Natural Selection in the Wild*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1986. I recommend this book as well for someone who wants to understand this topic. Although I don't think Endler anticipated the seriousness of free-riding or some of the genetic findings that complicate matters, he does have a more robust way of viewing natural selection than some others, and he points out some problems with how natural selection is commonly viewed. I used this book to write a lay article on natural selection. Lightner, J.K., Matters of fact ... what is natural selection? *Creation Matters* **15**(4):10–11, 2010.

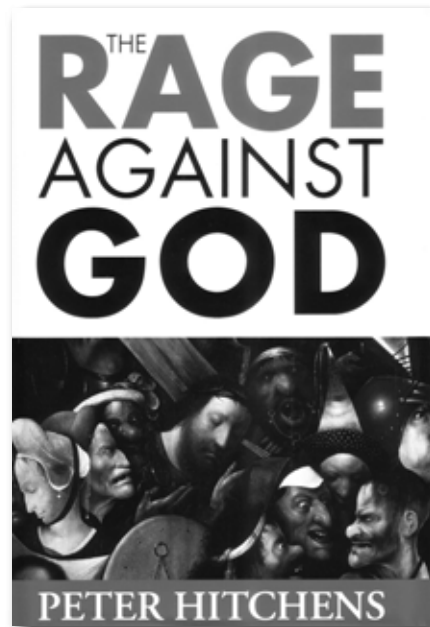
The totalitarian intolerance of the New Atheists

A review of
The Rage Against God
by Peter Hitchens
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Dominic Statham

Peter Hitchens is the brother of the prominent atheist Christopher Hitchens. He is an award-winning columnist and author, and currently writes for the British newspaper, *The Mail on Sunday*. Unlike his brother, Peter professes a Christian faith. Although he would not describe himself as a biblical fundamentalist, and would not argue for a literal interpretation of Genesis, he is a confirmed member of the Church of England and a strong supporter of Christian values and Christian morality. He has, however, not always been sympathetic to Christianity. In fact, as a teenager, he had rejected the Christian beliefs with which he had been raised as a child—even to the point of publicly burning a Bible—and joined the generation who were 'too clever to believe'. He embraced 'the faith of the faithless age', that science could explain everything we needed to know without reference to God. So vehemently had he turned away from God that he was almost physically disgusted by those who believed (p. 74).

In his book, Peter describes his journey from atheism to faith and refutes three of the common arguments presented by atheists—that conflicts fought in the name of religion are really about religion; that it is possible to know right from wrong without acknowledging the existence of God; and that the failed atheist states like the



Soviet Union were not truly atheist. In the final chapters he warns of the totalitarian intolerance of the New Atheists, their determination to drive out the remaining traces of Christianity from the laws and constitutions of Europe and North America, and their desire even to wrest from parents their freedom to raise children in a religious faith.

The fruit of atheism

Peter wrote that his own views changed slowly, as he came to see the fruit of atheism. Part of this realisation came when he was working as a journalist in Moscow, during the final years of the Soviet Union. His depiction of this godless society was sobering. He wrote of the riots that broke out when the vodka ration was cancelled one week; the bribes required to obtain anaesthetics at the dentist or antibiotics at the hospital; the frightening levels of divorce and abortion; the mistrust and surveillance; the unending official lies, manipulation and oppression; the squalor, desperation and harsh

incivility. Peter wrote of how traffic stopped dead in Moscow when rain began to fall, as every driver fetched wind-screen wipers from their hiding places and quickly fitted them to their holders. Any wipers left in place when cars were parked were stolen as a matter of course.

The atheist, humanistic ideology of the state, he believed, had even affected the Russian language. Peter spoke to a descendant of an exile, whose grandparents had fled Moscow in the days of Lenin. Having been brought up to speak pure Russian in his American home—the elegant, literary language of his parents—he was shocked when he visited Russia to hear the coarse, ugly, slang-infested and bureaucratic tongue that was now spoken, even by educated professionals.

Peter also wrote of what he saw as the growing public discourtesy and incivility in Britain. When he returned to London, after a five-year absence, he was shocked by the decline in people's behaviour. He commented,

“The rapid vanishing of Christianity from public consciousness and life, as the last fully Christian generation ages and disappears, seems to me to be a major part of it. I do not think I would have been half so shocked by the squalor and rudeness of 1990 Moscow, if I had not come from a country where Christian forbearance was still well-established. If I had then been able to see the London of 2010, I would have been equally shocked” (p. 66).

In many respects, Peter's book is a warning to people, as to the kind of society they can expect if they continue to reject Christian beliefs.

Perhaps an even starker warning of the desolation into which a civilised society can rapidly descend came to him when he visited the Somali capital Mogadishu in 1992 (figure 1). This had once been a city of smart cars, Italian-style pavement cafés, white-gloved policemen and modern shops. But, following

a civil war which had begun a year prior to his visit, this once prosperous metropolis had been transformed. There were now no trees, no shop fronts and no windows. Children were dying in stinking huts. Pick-up trucks, belonging to lawless militias, lined the streets, each with a machine gun mounted on it. The city still functioned, but in a barbaric way, run by clans, each controlling its own little territory—a land without a government. Peter wrote,

“When you have seen a place from which the whole apparatus of trust, civility and peace has been stripped, you are conscious as never before of the value of these things” (p. 71).

Three failed arguments

Chapter 9 is entitled, “Are conflicts fought in the name of religion conflicts about religion?” As we all know, a favourite mantra of the atheists is that religion is, of itself, a cause of conflict and must, therefore, be inherently wrong. Peter responds that this is a crude and factual misunderstanding. While he agrees that some wars are about religion, many which are claimed to be are not. Moreover, he notes that those who blame religion for wars tend to do so only when it suits them. Most atheists, he says,

are supporters of the political left and some wars which *are* caused by religion are sustained by factions with whom the left sympathise. The evidently religious nature of the Islamic war against the secular state of Israel, for example, is forgotten as the Arab coalition against Israel is regarded by the left as being in opposition to colonialism and therefore ‘progressive’. In their claim that religion causes wars, their real target is Christianity and the real beneficiary of their anti-Christian rants will be Islam, which remains totally uncowed by the New Atheism, and singularly unimpressed by Western wealth and military power (pp. 97, 98).

Chapter 10 is entitled, “Is it possible to determine what is right and what is wrong without God?” Peter responds unequivocally in the negative. An absolute moral code, he asserts, must be beyond human power to alter. Only God-given laws will stand above brute force and the belief, often embraced by totalitarians, that the strongest (or fittest) is always right. Only these limit the power of Kings and give rise to safeguards such as Magna Carta, Habeas Corpus and the Bill of Rights.

Chapter 11 is entitled, “Are atheist states not actually atheist?” in which Peter responds to his brother's argument that Joseph Stalin's Soviet



Figure 1. An abandoned Mogadishu street in 1993. Mogadishu had once been a beautiful city and a popular destination for tourists.

Photo courtesy of Wikipedia

Union was in fact a religious state, which explains, in his view, its failure to deliver the potential utopia made possible by true atheism. From his own experiences of living in Soviet Russia, Peter makes clear the folly of this claim and demonstrates the specifically antireligious (and particularly anti-Christian) nature of that and other communist regimes.

Atheism's fury

Peter asks, "Why is there such a fury against religion now?" He answers,

"Only one reliable force stands in the way of the power of the strong over the weak ... Only one reliable force restrains the hand of the man of power. And in an age of power-worship, the Christian religion has become the principal obstacle to the desire of earthly utopians for absolute power" (p. 83).

The great assault on God in Europe and North America, he believes, is a specific attack on Christianity. Jesus' dictum, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36) asserts that the utopian society of which the secularists dream is unattainable; and his statement, "the poor you will always have with you" (Matt. 22:11), refutes their belief that their quest for absolute power is justified because, one day, it will produce the perfect world. The Christian assertion that there is absolute truth and unalterable, divinely appointed laws repudiates their belief that morality is relative and that the end justifies the means. Christianity alone, he maintains, stands against the new alliance between political utopianism and the new cult of the unrestrained self, unleashed upon the Western world by many modern intellectuals (p. 98).

In his search for the answer to the question, 'Why do atheists want there to be no God?', Peter makes an interesting reference to Thomas Nagel, Professor of Philosophy and Law at New York University. In his book *The last Word*, Nagel discussed his fear of religion and wrote,

"I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself. I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers ... I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that" (p. 109).

Interestingly, Nagel continues, "My guess is that this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition and that it is responsible for much of the scientism and reductionism of our time. One of the tendencies it supports is the ludicrous overuse of evolutionary biology to explain everything about life, including everything about the human mind ... There might still be thought to be a religious threat in the existence of the laws of physics themselves ... but [this] seems to be less alarming to most atheists" (pp. 109, 110).

The New Atheism

In the last part of his book, Peter eloquently describes the vigour and determination with which the New Atheists are pursuing their cause. Secularism, he argues, is fundamentally a political movement which seeks, with increasing energy, to remove the Christian restraints on power and the remaining traces of Christian moral law. In their zeal to establish their dream of a godless utopia, Peter likens them to the antitheist Communist regimes which unapologetically brought tyranny and destruction upon millions. Soviet Communism, he writes, "used the same language, treasured the same hopes and appealed to the same constituency as Western atheism does today" (p. 121). Although presently in Europe and North America, their methods stop short of physical violence, instead they drive their opponents from public debate by scorn, misrepresentation and smears (p. 126)—and he could have added, firing them from their jobs, as documented in Jerry Bergman's book *Slaughter of the Dissidents*¹ and Ben Stein's documentary *Expelled*².

In the final chapter, Peter warns that the New Atheists are now laying the foundations of thought that will lead to religious instruction of children by parents being regulated and even prevented by law. Prominent writers, such as his brother Christopher and Professor Richard Dawkins now argue that raising children in the Christian (or any other) faith is nothing short of child abuse. Dawkins even argued, "Priestly groping of child bodies is disgusting. But it may be less harmful in the long run than priestly subversion of child minds" (p. 153). With this, too, is coming the push to outlaw the teaching of biblical creation. According to psychologist Professor Nicholas Humphrey, formerly of the London School of Economics,

"... children have a human right not to have their minds crippled by exposure to other people's bad ideas—no matter who these other people are ... we should no more allow parents to teach their children to believe, for example, in the literal truth of the Bible ..."

Instead, he argues, society has a duty to teach children "the best scientific and philosophical understanding of the natural world—to teach, for example, the truth of evolution ..." (pp. 153, 154).

Conclusion

The Rage Against God is a warm, honest testimony of a changed mind. In documenting his journey from unbelief to belief, Peter Hitchens unmasks the bankruptcy of the fashionable but deeply flawed arguments of the New Atheists. Drawing on his many years of international journalism, he points, compellingly, to the folly of man trying to make his way without God, and to the truth of the Christian worldview.

References

1. See review by Lloyd, T., If you can't beat them, ban them, *J. Creation* 23(3):37–40, 2009.
2. *Expelled: No intelligence allowed*, Premise Media, 2008.