



# A Response to Christopher Hitchens and His Book *God Is Not Great*

by

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Recently, I became aware of the book *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, written by Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011), which was published in 2007 by Twelve Books. “Hitch”, as he is called, was a renowned atheist, and his book was an attempt to convert people to atheism.

I first came across the book as I was researching the subject of atheism. I became intrigued when I read a summary of the book and found I agreed with just about everything said in the summary. What intrigued me the most was how these points, which caused Hitch to turn to atheism, were the very same points that caused me to formulate a new paradigm for God.

## The Fatal Mistake

I did not get very far into reading the book before I got my answer. The book is a rant against all the religions of the world. However, the book argues very little against the existence of God. The few points Hitch makes on the subject, which I will itemize later, are broad generalizations poorly supported by any valid argument.

One point Hitch makes, which I believe is fatal to his entire argument for atheism, is that “religion is man-made”. I whole heartedly agree with Hitch on the point that religions are man-made. They are mankind’s early attempts to understand the nature of God. I also agree with Hitch that, while each religion claims it is the “truth”, the fact remains that none of them hold up well to modern scientific scrutiny. However, in claiming religions are man-made, Hitch dooms his book to be merely a tirade about the bad things people do to each other in the name of their man-made religions. The book, in general, does little to argue against the existence of God, which is what atheism is all about.

I am surprised a man of Hitch’s caliber would think that, by merely pointing out the inconsistencies and man-made horrors of each religion, he can prove that God does not exist. His argument is like burning all the books and claiming intellectual thought no longer exists. Hitch talks of how important it is to use our rational faculties, but yet he bases all of his arguments for atheism on things man-made rather than rationally attacking the concept of God directly.

The counter argument to his whole book is merely recognizing the fact that mankind does not yet have a good concept of God. What the world religions preach may have made sense to people thousands of years ago, but today we need a new paradigm for God – one that stands up to scientific scrutiny and rational thought. Despite what Hitch says, science and God are compatible with each other.

## Where We Agree

I have already stated I agree with much of what Hitch says in his book. In the last section, I agreed with his basic point that religion is man-made. Here is a list of other points Hitch makes in his book with which I agree. Some of the comments on each point are from the book and some are from me alone.

- Religion kills - there have been too many wars fought in the name of religion;
- In certain parts of the world, it is dangerous to encounter people of a different faith who have just come out of a prayer meeting (e.g. Beirut, Belfast, Bombay, and Baghdad);
- Religion tries to control sex - masturbation does not cause you to go blind, and contraceptives can help to control the spread of the AIDS virus;
- Religion tries to control what we eat - pork is good for you as the other white meat;
- Religion tries to control marriage and divorce - a woman should not be condemned to stay in an abusive relationship;
- Circumcision of women is wrong and religions tend to portray women as second class citizens - women cannot become priests;
- Religion tries to regulate medical discoveries - religions should not interfere with attempts to eradicate diseases, such as polio;
- Intelligent Design is bad science - organs, like the eye, did evolve over time rather than having irreducible complexity;
- The Old Testament is neither historical fact, nor the word of God - the Old Testament are stories passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, and the stories changed based on the bias of each new storyteller;
- The New Testament is inconsistent - Jesus preached to his apostles so they would carry his message to other parts of the world, but then Saint Paul took over;

- Mary did not have a virgin birth - the concept is medically impossible and came about due to a translation issue of the word "ulmah" (a young woman) in the Hebrew version of the Old Testament to the word "parthenos" (virgin) in the Greek Septuagint version;
- Religions come and go - there are ancient (and some not so ancient) religions that no longer exist;
- Preachers of eastern religious philosophy can be just as corrupt as preachers of western religions - too many preachers, and gurus alike, are in it for the money they can get people to contribute;
- There are no miracles where the fundamental laws of science are violated, or suspended - the Sun did not physically dance at Fatima;
- There is no place on earth that has special holiness - Mecca;
- Some religions are founded by immoral people - Joseph Smith's writing of the Book of Mormon is highly questionable for the secretive way it was written;
- One does not have to be religious to live a moral and upright life - Christopher Hitchens is an example;
- Humans developed through a random process on Earth, and may not be the only intelligent form of life in the universe - the evolution of the brain could have progressed differently on other worlds;
- There is no Satan, and Hell does not exist as a place where we are sent for eternity - too many religions use this as the place to send the "unbelievers".

I especially agree with one of Hitch's conclusions. Both he and I agree it is time for science and rational thought to take a more major role in the lives of individuals. However, I disagree we should base our lives solely on science.

## The Theory of Evolution Leaves Unanswered Questions

My first disagreement with Hitch is his belief that science can and will explain everything. No mention is made in the book about how the long standing belief in the deterministic nature of our physical universe is being shaken by the indeterministic, but probabilistic, nature of the subatomic world. Also not mentioned, and I did not expect it to be mentioned in a book advocating atheism, is the reality of the human mind, and how it is something very different from the reality of the physical universe and the reality of the subatomic world.

Hitch spends a great deal of time in his book supporting the Theory of Evolution. I completely support the Theory of Evolution as explaining how life developed on the Earth. However, I have a problem with one aspect of the theory. Why does the female of the species *choose* the male with the better genes? In our own human population, I see a lot of unwed teenage mothers who *chose* to mate with someone who does not have the decency to be responsible for his actions. Is this picking someone with the best genes? Science does not try to explain why the female makes her choice. We are just supposed to blindly accept they do, just as religions expect us to blindly accept some of their dogmas.

## Not Everything Is Deterministic

One of the few arguments Hitch directly makes against God is based on the assumption that everything is deterministic. Hitch claims the following question is unanswerable. If God created the universe, then who created the creator? According to Hitch, since everything is deterministic, then everything that happens is caused by something that happened before it. Hence, if God caused our physical universe to come into existence, then something else must have caused God to occur.

Now, Hitch cannot argue against the belief among scientists that the world did come into existence approximately 14 billion years ago,

because the scientifically derived Big Bang Theory says it did. The flaw in Hitch's argument is he assumes that determinism extended to the period prior to the Big Bang. The Standard Model of particle physics, upon which much of our theory of the opening moments of our universe is based, clearly shows that the first things to appear were the sub-atomic particles. These particles, according to particle physicists, follow a law that is indeterminate, yet probabilistic. Hence, even in the early moments of the Big Bang, determinism did not exist according to scientific theory.

There is absolutely no scientific evidence for the existence of determinism prior to the Big Bang. Even from a logic point of view, determinism could not have existed. A tautology occurs if everything is deterministic. If there cannot be a first cause, which determinism does not allow, there has to be an infinite sequence of events that happened in the past with each event caused by another event before it. If the past is an infinite sequence of events, how did we ever get to the present? I find it interesting how Hitch conveniently leaves this issue out of his discussion.

To avoid this tautology, logic dictates there must be a first cause somewhere that began the sequence of events which eventually became our present universe. This opens the possibility for the existence of a God in some form. I agree this line of reasoning is not a definitive argument for the existence of God, but it certainly shows one cannot use this line of reasoning to prove God does not exist.

In other parts of the book, Hitch even seems to contradict himself on the issue of everything being deterministic. While he avoids discussing the subject of free will, he does recognize that people can make choices. He discusses how, if a "miracle" is observed, the observer makes a choice as to whether he believes an actual miracle did occur, or whether the miracle is only a perception and the laws of science

were not temporarily suspended. Saying we have the ability to make a choice implies the human mind is not deterministic.

### Science and God Can Be Compatible

Another assertion Hitch makes in his book is that science and God are not compatible. While not stating it directly, Hitch's line of reasoning is, if science and God are not compatible *and* we know our science to be true, then God cannot be true. While the logic is good, a logical argument depends solely upon people accepting the premises on which the argument is built. The premise in this case is his belief that science and God are not compatible.

To support his premise, Hitch points out the inconsistencies of the dogmas of various religions. I agree the dogmas of the various religions are indeed incompatible with what we know to be true in modern science. I would even support a premise stating that science and *present religious dogma* are not compatible. I recognize this leads to the conclusion that the dogmas of present religions are not true, and I believe this is a major reason why people are turning away from religion.

However, Hitch tries to generalize his premise by substituting "God" for "the dogmas of various religions". He provides no evidence for this generalization. We have already agreed religions are man-made. It logically follows that the dogmas of these religions are also man-made. It does not logically follow that man-made dogmas can somehow be generalized to God. Without any additional evidence directly relating to God to support this generalization, the premise that science and God are incompatible is not a valid premise. Hence, Hitch cannot use this argument to logically argue that God cannot be true.

To be fair, I have provided no evidence yet on how science and God can be compatible. My own personal belief in God is based on a three reality model consisting of 1) the deterministic reality of the physical

universe, 2) the indeterministic, but probability-based, reality of the sub-atomic particles, and 3) the indeterministic, and not probability-based, reality of the human mind. The existence of the first two realities is based on scientific fact. The existence of the third reality is known to us through our own conscious minds in our ability to learn, to create works of art, and to make free decisions from the alternative solutions our mind presents to us.

In my new paradigm of God, our minds are part of a greater mind that is God. We know we have experiential memories, but science (i.e. neuroscience) cannot explain where these experiential memories are stored in our physical brain. Some scientists are even exploring the sub-atomic world for an answer to this issue. Lacking any scientific evidence, I believe as a matter of faith that these experiential memories are stored as part of the mind of God.

Our minds have the ability to be a first cause of things within the deterministic physical universe. None of the cities, highways, or other infrastructures built by mankind would exist if not for the ability of the human mind to be the first cause of these structures. God, who exists outside of time and space, has this same ability to create things. God was the first cause of the universe by using vacuum energy to create the first particles at the time of the Big Bang.

In my beliefs, life occurs when a connection is made between God and a cell, or collection of cells. This connection allows God to influence the evolution of life by presenting alternatives to the mind of the life form (as small or as fuzzy as that mind may be). It is this connection with God that influences a female to choose an appropriate mate to advance the species according to the Theory of Evolution.

The God of my new paradigm is not an all-everything God, but has certain limitations. God cannot suspend the physical laws of the universe to cause a “miracle”. God cannot predict the future given that



our human minds can make free decisions between the alternatives our mind presents to us. God created the universe and lets it run its course. As a result, perfection is not something God controls. We have to accept the bad things that happen as well as the good.

And lastly, I do not claim to know the truth about God. Hence, my paradigm of God does not try to establish any unchangeable dogmas. My paradigm is allowed to change as we discover more and more about the universe in which we live. As a result, my paradigm of God remains compatible with science. So, it is possible for science and God to be compatible. As a result, Hitch's premise is not true, and his argument does nothing to disprove the trueness of God.

### Hitler and Stalin Did Not Act Like Gods

The majority of what Hitch writes in the book is about the bad things mankind does to itself. He also ties these bad things to the fact that the perpetrators are acting in the name of religion. Then, he talks about the atheists he knows and how they are good and upright people. He even dares to claim that the percentage of "religious people" doing bad things is far greater than the percentage of atheists doing bad things.

As I mentioned earlier, I do believe atheists can lead good and productive lives. However, I also know many people of faith who are good and upright people. Hitch's book says nothing about the millions of believers who try to do the right things with their lives.

But let us look at few facts on the subject. Mankind had a violent path as it evolved into what it is today. Just as lower life forms will defend their territory, man has a natural tendency to defend his territory and to protect his extended families (i.e. his tribes). Hitch blames the atrocities that happened in the former Yugoslavia and in Uganda on religion. While it is true the warring factions were of different religions, they were also people from different tribes or ethnic backgrounds. The

genocide that occurred in these countries would have happened anyway even if there were no religion in the world.

Whether Hitch likes it or not, most of the people in the world, including those in power, profess to some belief in a God. So, when an atrocity occurs in our world, there is a high probability it will be performed by someone who professes to a religion. This, unfortunately, gives the perception that a high percentage of “religious people” are doing bad things. However, just because a “religious person” commits an atrocity, it does not mean the atrocity is condoned by God. Also, just because the elders of a religion do not speak out against the atrocity, it still does not mean the atrocity is condoned by God.

Finally, there are many bad people who use God and religion to justify their actions. If you were a person with hatred toward a neighboring tribe, which of the two following statements would motivate the other members of your tribe to join you in a massacre:

- I hate the other tribe, so join me in killing them.
- God has ordained that we are his people, and that we must kill the unbelievers.

Just because you use religion to further your cause does not mean God, or even the religion, is the cause of the atrocity.

Now many people argue Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin are examples where atrocities have been committed for non-religious reasons. Toward the end of the book, Hitch tries to address these arguments. While Hitler was a Catholic (a marginal one at best), his “final solution” against the Jews was based on ethnic cleansing rather than religious differences. Stalin was an atheist who tried hard to stamp out religion in his native Russia. Hitch argues the atrocities performed by these totalitarian governments were caused by the fact these leaders *acted like Gods*. My response to this accusation can be summed up in the simple observation that all people who perform atrocities against their

fellow men, whether they proclaim a religious affiliation or not, are *acting like there is no God* (i.e. atheists, by definition).

Now, I apologize to all the good atheists who objected to the previous statement. Atheists, like people of faith, do not generally perform atrocities against their fellow men. However, in my view of God, and that of many other people of faith, God does not condone atrocities either. So, where is Hitch's apology for comparing people like Hitler and Stalin to God?

What Hitch appears to have meant by his statement is that the governments of Hitler and Stalin were set up similar to some theocracies. In a theocracy, the government tries to control all aspects of the people's lives, and there is one (or maybe a few) religious elders at the top who lay down all the rules and who do not have to answer to anyone – similar to the government of Iran today. But here, again, theocracies, like religion, are man-made. And once again, Hitch is trying to take something that is man-made and generalize it to the level of God without trying to justify it with one shred of evidence.

### Is Science Just a Religion for Atheists

Before ending this response to Hitch's book, I have to state a concern I have for Hitch's *New Enlightenment* where we should base our lives on rational thought and what science tells us. Does this not amount to the establishment of another religion of sorts - a religion of science? Do not the scientific laws of the physical universe become a new set of dogmas? Do not colleges and universities become the new churches? Do not people who have been indoctrinated into the science by obtaining higher level degrees become our priests? Do not learned societies dictate what we should or should not believe about our physical world (e.g. whether Pluto is a planet), and also have the power to declare that someone's theory is the scientific equivalent of a heresy?

Is it not science that created the thermonuclear bomb and other weapons of mass destruction? So science kills just like religion kills. You may argue that science does not use the weapons. But, were not the first atomic bombs developed by scientists designed specifically to be used on Japan at the end of World War II? I noticed this mass killing of people by science was given no mention in Hitch's book.

Is it not science that dictates when human life begins? Is it not science that has developed means to abort a fetus, and is it not science that allows abortions to occur? Is it not science that has developed tests to determine the viability of an unborn infant, and is it not science that has developed genetic testing to determine whether couples should even have children? It sounds like science is trying to control how we reproduce. Similarly, science is also developing rules about when we should die (e.g. when life support equipment should be turned off). Again, no mention of this is made in Hitch's book.

Is it not science that created the pesticides to increase the yields of our crops – the very same pesticides that have now infiltrated our water systems? Is it not science that is creating foods that are bio-engineered? It sounds like science is trying to control what we eat. Does any of this sound an awful lot like what Hitch argues against – only replacing the word "religion" with the word "science"?

Is it not the indoctrinated scientists that argue there is no God? Is science trying to suppress our belief in a God? Do people of science feel like they know the truth of the universe and that people of faith are the unbelievers? So, is the rhetoric Hitch uses in his book about the New Enlightenment nothing more than an attempt to get people to abandon their faith in God and come to the light of the truth of science? Is Hitch just a missionary for this new religion of science? For someone who supposedly hates religion, he sure seems to be arguing for one.

I am not trying to argue that science is in any way bad, nor am I arguing there is anything bad about scientific theory. However, I am concerned about what mankind does with their science. As I have pointed out, Hitch's arguments are not directly against God. They are arguments against what mankind has done in the name of God. All the bad things people have done in the name of religion are man-made. What is going to keep people from doing bad things in the name of science? Just because the religion changes does not mean the violent tendencies of mankind are going to change.

### Some Final Thoughts

I openly admit that I am dualist in the mind-body philosophy of René Descartes (1596-1650). It bothers me that science does not yet recognize the reality of the human mind. It further bothers me that universities require Master's and Doctoral students to only take courses in their specific field of study. This intense indoctrination into the established science causes these students not to be able to see the forest from the trees. There is a need for people to take a step backward and look at the bigger picture.

Our universe, as we know it, is the complex interplay of at least three very different realities - our deterministic physical universe, the probability-based indeterministic world of the subatomic particle, and the indeterministic, and not probability-based, world of the human mind. It is the reality of the human mind that opens up the real possibility of a God. Faith and science should not be in opposition to each other. Rather, they should operate hand-in-hand where science is what we know, and faith is what we believe to be true, but have not yet discovered.

I can see where Christopher Hitchens' book *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* will cause some people to re-evaluate their religion and the dogmas of those religions. This, I believe, is a good

thing as our faith should be our own and not just what we are told to believe by others. The book will also cause some people to stop practicing their faith. I believe this to be questionable since religious congregations, at least at the local level, can be a powerful force for good in a community where people help each other regardless of their personal beliefs.

There will also be those caught up in the rhetoric of the book and abandon all belief in God and join the ranks of the atheists. These people, I believe, have been misled. Hitch's arguments for atheism may sound good on the surface, but any logical and rational person should realize all Hitch talks about in the book are the bad things that humans do in the name of their *man-made* religions. Hitch does little to argue directly against the existence of God. The arguments he does make on the subject are nothing more than gross generalizations which are unsupported by credible facts or logical argumentation. For the misled, I suggest they re-examine their own human minds and develop a set of beliefs that make sense to them. They may still settle on atheism, but at least they are now operating on their own beliefs rather than just giving in to the rhetoric of the book.

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