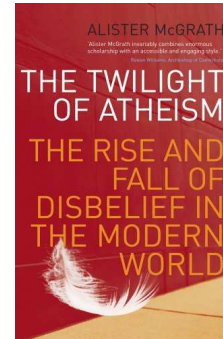


## What Every Atheist Should Read

### The Twilight of Atheism *The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* By Alister McGrath

After the flurry of stridently anti-God books that have filled bookshops recently, some people with religious faith might fear that their beliefs are, after all, irrational, ridiculous or even dangerous. Well, Alister McGrath's compellingly argued book should allay your anxiety.



I picked this book up thinking "Hmm, interesting title... might help me to understand better where atheists are coming from."

I put it down, having read it, thinking "Surely no reasonable person could remain a convinced atheist if they had read this book with an open mind."

I have met many people who define themselves as atheists. Some are really philosophical agnostics who simply believe that neither God's existence nor his non-existence can be proven beyond reasonable doubt. Others however, fit the definition of atheism: the belief that there is no God. Some are atheists because they firmly believe that science has disproved God; some say that God is just a psychological delusion; and some hold that God is merely an invention of the powerful to oppress the powerless.

This book deals with the historical of those views and the reasoning on which they are based. And it is that rarest of literary commodities: a book that is both scholarly and well researched but also highly accessible and engaging. Written by an author who trained as a scientist and was himself once a convinced atheist, now turned Christian, Alister McGrath presents a fascinating and well balanced view of his subject. He does not set out to debunk atheism (in fact he generally treats it with great respect) but he does the historical contingencies and gifted individuals which gave rise to this worldview. McGrath is careful to highlight the strengths of atheism as well as its weaknesses. He also has no hesitation in pointing the finger at various corrupted and oppressive versions of Christianity in the West during the last 3 centuries as being a justifiable fertile breeding-ground for anti-God sentiment:

*"Atheism stands as a permanent judgment over arrogant, complacent and superficial Christian churches and leaders. It needs to be heard." (p.273)*

Nevertheless, this book is a compelling counter-argument to both the academic theories and assertions of atheism, as well to the drabness and brutality of atheist regimes which rose to power in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Intellectually, it becomes very clear that the case for atheism is stalled and found wanting. Very thoroughly this book makes a convincing argument that *"The belief that there is no God is just as much a matter of faith as the belief that there is a God...In recent years there has been a growing recognition of the ultimate circularity of the great atheist philosophies."* (p.180)

Alongside the intellectual rebuttal, we get a disturbing picture of what life lived under atheistic ideology looks like. Not only is it imaginatively impoverished, but it has a worrying tendency to replicate the religious intolerance it so abhors: *"As the history of the atheist state makes clear, [atheism] inevitably sets an agenda for repression and oppression. A worldview that was once acclaimed as a liberator thus became an oppressor."* (p.232)

I recommend you read this book from cover to cover – every chapter throws a fascinating light on a different aspect of atheism and its practice. The book's conclusions about the future of atheism as a credible worldview may surprise some who are the children of a culture where secularism was the dominant ideology. The rise of post-modernism (itself a partial reaction to atheistic modernism) and of Pentecostal Christianity in the 2/3 world have left the number of adherents of atheism in decline and firmly on the defensive. If McGrath is right, it might well turn out to be a terminal case.

Order this book from your friendly bookstore manager, Jean Cunningham (jean@cunningham.net)