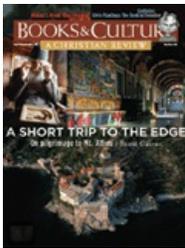


“You Might Say that Some of His Forays into Philosophy Are at Best Sophomoric, but That Would be Unfair to Sophomores” — Plantinga Reviews Dawkins

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Alvin Plantinga, perhaps the most influential Christian philosopher in the world today, has issued a devastating review of *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins. It is not to be missed.

Plantinga, who serves as John A. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, published his review in the current issue of *Books & Culture*.

Plantinga acknowledges Dawkins' influence and giftedness as a writer. "Dawkins is perhaps the world's most popular science writer; he is also an extremely *gifted* science writer," he explains.

Nevertheless, none of this qualifies Dawkins to venture into philosophy and theology:

Now despite the fact that this book is mainly philosophy, Dawkins is not a philosopher (he's a biologist). Even taking this into account, however, much of the philosophy he purveys is at best jejune. You might say that some of his forays into philosophy are at best sophomoric, but that would be unfair to sophomores; the fact is (grade inflation aside), many of his arguments would receive a failing grade in a sophomore philosophy class. This, combined with the arrogant, smarter-than-thou tone of the book, can be annoying. I shall put irritation aside, however and do my best to take Dawkins' main argument seriously.

Ouch. That is stinging prose. When Alvin Plantinga tells you that you are not a philosopher, rest assured that you have been put on notice. But, as Plantinga promises, he does attempt to understand Dawkins' main argument — such as it is. As expected, Plantinga's review essay is itself an exercise in Christian thinking. After an extended analysis of Dawkins' argument, Plantinga concludes:

According to classical theism, God is a necessary being; it is not so much as possible that there should be no such person as God; he exists in all possible worlds. But if God is a necessary being, if he exists in all possible worlds, then the probability that he exists, of course, is 1, and the probability that he does not exist is 0. Far from its being improbable that he exists, his existence is maximally probable. So if Dawkins proposes that God's existence is improbable, he owes us an argument for the conclusion that there is no necessary being with the attributes of God—an argument that doesn't just start from the premise that materialism is true. Neither he nor anyone else has provided even a decent argument along these lines; Dawkins doesn't even seem to be aware that he needs an argument of that sort.

In other words, Dawkins doesn't come close to succeeding in his argument that God's existence is improbable. To the contrary, his argument falls in on itself. As Plantinga explains, "*The God Delusion* is full of bluster and bombast, but it really doesn't give even the slightest reason for thinking belief in God mistaken, let alone a "delusion." Nicely said.

Furthermore, Plantinga puts his finger on Dawkins' greater intellectual problem — his radical naturalism.

Consider these words:

The real problem here, obviously, is Dawkins' naturalism, his belief that there is no such person as God or anyone like God. That is because naturalism implies that evolution is unguided. So a broader conclusion is that one can't rationally accept both naturalism and evolution; naturalism, therefore, is in conflict with a premier doctrine of contemporary science. People like Dawkins hold that there is a conflict between science and religion because they think there is a conflict between evolution and theism; the truth of the matter, however, is that the conflict is between science and naturalism, not between science and belief in God.

And finally:

The naturalism that Dawkins embraces, furthermore, in addition to its intrinsic unloveliness and its dispiriting conclusions about human beings and their place in the universe, is in deep self-referential trouble. There is no reason to believe it; and there is excellent reason to reject it.

There is also excellent reason to add Alvin Plantinga's essay to your reading list.

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