



A Christian Response to 'Against All Gods'. Part One: Intellectual respectability

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Contra Grayling: A Christian Response to 'Against All Gods' (Part One: Intellectual respectability)

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A.C. Grayling, Professor of Philosophy at Birkbeck College, University of London, begins his self-described 'polemic' against religion with a question and an answer:

'Does Religion deserve respect? I argue that it deserves no more respect than any other viewpoint, and not as much as most.'¹

Thereafter, Grayling's critique of 'all gods' is primarily a double-barrelled assault upon:

§ the intellectual respectability of faith in God and,
§ the ethical respectability of religious believers and institutions as such.

Part one of this review will focus upon the question of intellectual respectability. Part two will focus on ethical matters.

Is Faith Irrational or Untrue?

Concerning the intellectual respectability of faith, Grayling writes:

some on my own side of the argument here make the mistake of thinking that the dispute about supernaturalistic beliefs is whether they are true or false. Epistemology teaches us that the key point is about rationality.²

While epistemology (the theory of knowledge) does distinguish between the *truth* and the *rationality* of a belief,³ this doesn't make it sensible to claim that truth doesn't matter! Just as a defendant might be guilty even if the jury would be irrational to convict him on the available evidence, so God might exist even if it appears irrational to believe it. This observation makes the charge of irrationality less interesting, and therefore less basic, than the charge of falsehood.

Strangely, Grayling recasts even so traditional a fact-directed objection to theism as the logical problem of evil as an objection merely to its rationality:

to believe in the existence of (say) a benevolent and omnipotent deity in the face of childhood cancers and mass deaths in tsunamis and earthquakes [is an example of] serious irrationality.⁴

Grayling does not give an actual *argument* to this effect; and he appears to be ignorant of the fact that, 'philosophers of religion have cast serious doubt on whether there even is any inconsistency involving the appropriate propositions regarding evil and God's alleged properties.'⁵ As William L. Rowe explains:

Some philosophers have contended that the existence of evil is *logically inconsistent* with the existence of the theistic God. No one, I think, has succeeded in establishing such an extravagant

claim. Indeed, granted incompatibilism, there is a fairly compelling argument for the view that the existence of evil is logically consistent with the existence of the theistic God.⁶

Religion is ...

What, more precisely, is Grayling's target? He asserts (Grayling is *very good* at simply asserting things) that:

by definition a religion is something centred upon belief in the existence of supernatural agencies or entities in the universe; and not merely in their existence, but in their interest in human beings on this planet; and not merely their interest, but their particularly detailed interest in what humans wear, what they eat, when they eat it [etc.].⁷

This increasingly specific list of characteristics is presumably meant to constitute some sort of (too-obvious-to-be-worth-spelling-out) argument about the absurdities of thinking that God would be interested in his creation (if he goes to the trouble of existing). However, it also suggests (incorrectly, I'm sure) that Grayling has never heard of non-theistic Buddhists, Deists, Aristotelians, Pantheists, or people who are naturalists save for the belief that their mind is more than their brain (for the human spirit or soul of a vegan certainly counts as a supernatural entity interested in human beings and what they eat!). In fact, it is notoriously difficult to define religion. As Eric S. Waterhouse observed, 'No definition of religion has ever been framed which touches it's every aspect in life, and none has found even a considerable measure of general acceptance.'⁸

Religious Apologists and Ordinary Believers

Grayling complains:

Apologists for faith are an evasive community, who seek to avoid or deflect criticism by slipping behind the abstractions of higher theology, a mist-shrouded domain of long words, superfine distinctions and vague subtleties, in some of which God is nothing ... and does not even exist ... But religion is not theology; it is the practice and outlook of ordinary people into most of whom supernaturalistic beliefs and superstitions were inculcated as children when they could not assess

the value of what they were being sold as a world view; and it is the falsity of this, and its consequences for a suffering world, that critics attack.⁹

This complaint requires some untangling. Certain apologists are criticised for defending beliefs (such as the non-existence of God) that by no stretch of the imagination represent the beliefs of the ordinary believer. I have no problem with criticising such beliefs, or such apologists. Apologists *in general* are criticised for defending the faith by using:

- § abstractions,
- § long-words that non-experts don't understand,
- § super-fine distinctions, and
- § vague subtleties.

However, abstractions, technical language, fine distinctions and even vague subtleties are the natural stock in trade of philosophers, scientists and indeed all scholars who defend contested viewpoints upon the world.

Grayling himself is not above using abstractions ('religion', as well as the behaviour of its adherents, is an 'abstraction' in Grayling's polemic), long-words that non-experts don't understand (try out 'insipissated gloaming'¹⁰ for size), super-fine distinctions (like that between atheism and naturalism) and vague subtleties (into which category one might very well put every hint of an argument in Grayling's book).

Apologists should, of course, do their best to ground their abstractions in sufficient data with convincing logic, to explain their terminology for the un-initiated, to avoid distinctions that are so *fine* that they become 'distinctions without a difference' (distinctions that are precisely fine enough are a mark of philosophical excellence) and to retain vague subtleties for subjects upon which they are vague and/or which truly require subtle understanding. From Grayling's tone one imagines that he would accuse all religious apologists of failing to live up to these intellectual responsibilities. Unfortunately, he provides no evidence to back up what is a hasty generalization at best, and a straw man (an easy-to-defeat caricature of an opponent's position) at worst.

Personal experience leads me to think that

Grayling would be surprised at just how much theology and apologetics is part-and-parcel of even the 'ordinary' religious believer's life and faith.

Finally, I doubt that Grayling's assumption about supernatural beliefs being inculcated into children who cannot assess the value of what they are being sold as a worldview is born out by the evidence. For example, as the 2005 *Dare to Engage* questionnaire revealed, a large proportion of A-level students who have been brought up in religious households and communities profess to being undecided about buying into that faith tradition.

Should Faith Command Intellectual Respect?

According to Grayling:

It is time to refuse to tiptoe around people who claim respect ... on the grounds that they have a religious faith ... as if it were noble to believe in unsupported claims and ancient superstitions. It is neither. Faith is a commitment to belief contrary to evidence and reason ... to believe something in the face of evidence and against reason – to believe something by faith – is ignoble, irresponsible and ignorant, and merits the opposite of respect.¹¹

I wholeheartedly agree that a commitment to belief *contrary* to evidence and reason is ignoble. I wholeheartedly disagree that this is an accurate description of my Christian faith.

Grayling's description of faith commits the straw man fallacy. This fallacy is committed, 'when an arguer distorts an opponent's position for the purpose of making it [easier] to destroy, refutes the distorted position, and concludes that his opponent's actual view is thereby demolished.'¹² Grayling's definition of faith is a straw man because, while irrational beliefs are easy to critique, few Christians would accept Grayling's easy-to-critique definition of 'faith' as one that applies to them. It is certainly not how the Bible portrays faith. Consider a smattering of what the Bible says about evidence and reason:

§ The cosmos is the creation of a rational God who made humans in his own 'image' (Genesis 1:27).

§ God says to humans: 'let us *reason* together' (Isaiah 1:18).

§ The Prophet Samuel stood before Israel and

said: 'I am going to confront you with *evidence* before the Lord' (1 Samuel 12:7).

§ According to Jesus, the greatest commandment includes the requirement to 'love the Lord your God ... *with all your mind*' (Matthew 22:37).

§ Jesus said: 'Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least *believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves*' (John 14:11).

§ Paul wrote of '*defending and confirming the gospel*' (Philippians 1:7) and he '*reasoned ... from the Scriptures, explaining and proving*' (Acts 17:2–3).

§ Christians are commanded: 'always be prepared to *give an answer* to everyone who asks you to give the *reason* for the hope that you have ... with gentleness and respect' (1 Peter 3:15).

The Greek translated as 'reason' is '*apologia*' – from which we get the word 'apologetics' – which means 'reasoned defence'. Apologetics is the art of giving a reasoned defence for Christianity. The New Testament portrays apologetics as a part of 'spiritual warfare' wherein Christians '*demolish arguments* and every pretension that sets itself up against the *knowledge* of God' (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Apologetics uses scholarship of many kinds, which all involve a commitment to the 'laws of reason' at the heart of philosophy. As C.S. Lewis wrote, 'Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.'¹³ Tom Price observes that, 'when the New Testament talks about faith positively it *only* uses words derived from the Greek root [*pistis*] which means "to be persuaded."¹⁴ While it is true that Colossians 2:8 warns Christians against being taken 'captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition ... and not according to Christ', this warning 'is not a prohibition against philosophy as such, but against false philosophy ... In fact, Paul is warning against a specific false philosophy, a kind of incipient Gnosticism ... the definite article "this" in [the] Greek indicates a particular philosophy.'¹⁵

Astonishingly, Grayling references the New Testament story of doubting Thomas (John 20:24–31) – who refused to accept the eye-witness testimony of ten friends as to the reality of Jesus' resurrection (but who accepted this reality following his own resurrection encounter) – as

supporting his straw-man re-definition of faith. However, in this story Jesus commends people who believe *without having to see for themselves*, not those who believe *without evidence*, let alone *against the evidence*. Before Jesus offered himself to Thomas for a personal examination, Thomas was hardly being asked to believe without evidence! Moreover, the reason John gives for recounting these events is that they are *evidence* for the truth of the gospel (John 20:30–31).

Grayling asserts: ‘it is the business of all religious doctrines to keep their votaries in a state of intellectual infancy (how else do they keep absurdities seeming credible?).’¹⁶ Unable to imagine an intellectually mature person who does not think all religion absurd, Grayling deduces that all religious believers must be intellectually immature. He is apparently untroubled by the observation that at least some religious believers are intellectually mature thinkers. For example, secular philosopher John Gray pays contemporary religious scholars the following compliment:

One cannot engage in dialogue with religious thinkers in Britain today without quickly discovering that they are, on the whole, more intelligent, better educated and strikingly more freethinking than unbelievers (as evangelical atheists still incongruously describe themselves).¹⁷

According to Gray, accusations like Grayling’s say more about the accuser than the accused:

Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill were adamant that religion would die out with the advance of science. That has not come about, and there is not the remotest prospect of it happening in the foreseeable future. Yet the idea that religion can be eradicated from human life remains an article of faith among humanists. As secular ideology is dumped throughout the world, they are left disorientated and gawping. It is this painful cognitive dissonance, I believe, that accounts for the particular rancour and intolerance of many secular thinkers. Unable to account for the irrepressible vitality of religion, they can react only with puritanical horror and stigmatize it as irrational.¹⁸

Oxford philosopher A.J. Ayer was reportedly ‘puzzled by the fact that philosophers whom he respected intellectually, such as Michael Dummett, had religious beliefs’, but at least he ‘had to admit that this was the case.’¹⁹ James Lazarus has publicly reconsidered his prior belief that it is impossible to be reasonable and be a believer:

the claim that a reasonable person cannot believe in God can be seriously questioned ... I have personally met many believers that I would call very rational, reasonable, and intelligent people. I would not merely call them rational, reasonable, and intelligent in general, but I would go on to say that they are rational, reasonable, and intelligent with respect to their belief in God.²⁰

Mere Assertion

Nigel Warburton notes that, ‘Merely asserting something, no matter how loudly, doesn’t make it true. Confident assertion is no substitute for argument.’²¹ One of the principle faults of *Against All Gods* is a repeated indulgence in making assertions without requisite supporting evidence, or even against the evidence. In other words, Grayling fits his own re-definition of ‘faith’.

For example, Grayling simply asserts: ‘Religion is a man-made device, not least of oppression and control.’²² No evidence or arguments are given in support of this sweeping generalization. Then again, Grayling asserts that the story of Jesus’s birth is on a par with other Middle Eastern tales, such as ‘Hercules and his labours.’²³ There is no engagement with the relevant historical scholarship. There is, moreover, no engagement with the many obvious *dis-analogies* between the *historical* witness concerning Jesus on the one hand,²⁴ and Grayling’s generic *mythological* ‘ancient story of a deity impregnating a mortal woman who then gives birth to a heroic figure whose deeds earn him a place in heaven’²⁵ on the other. For example, Jesus is not presented by the New Testament as having earned his place in heaven by his deeds. If anything, he is presented as ‘earning’ *our* place in heaven. Tales of gods making mortal women pregnant with heroic demi-gods (and Jesus is no *demi*-god in the Gospels) may have been common in the Middle East, but they were not at all common in the *Jewish* context which gave birth to Christianity. Grayling’s attack

on belief in Mary's virginal conception is pure bluster:

ask a Christian why the ancient story of a deity impregnating a mortal woman ... is false as applied to Zeus and his many paramours ... but true as applied to God, Mary and Jesus ... Do not expect a rational reply; an appeal to faith will be enough, because with faith anything goes.²⁶

Unfortunately for Grayling, this generalization is demonstrably false. For example, whilst Professor of the History and Philosophy of Religion at King's College, London University, Christian philosopher Keith Ward wrote a paper on 'Evidence for the Virgin Birth', in which he justified belief in the nativity story *with evidence*:

The strongest argument for the veracity of these accounts is that it is very hard to see why they should have been invented, when they would have been so shocking to Jewish ears ... there are two independent sources of the virgin birth stories; and that increases the probability that they were founded on historical recollections.²⁷

Whether or not Ward's historical arguments are sound (I think they are), the point is that Grayling's is plainly wrong about Christian belief in the virgin birth having nothing to do with evidence. Some Christians may believe in the virgin birth without *direct* evidence (some might even believe without *indirect* evidence). But some Christians at least hold this belief because they think the evidence directly merits their doing so.

Of course, Grayling dismisses the idea that 'it is reasonable for people to believe that the gods suspend the laws of nature occasionally.'²⁸ If the plural is replaced with the singular, this is a belief that I hold and which I believe to be reasonable. Grayling offers me no reason to think that I am wrong; he simply (indirectly) *asserts* that I am.

Likewise, in *The Meaning of Things* Grayling ironically asserts: 'The happy fact about miracles is that they require no support in the way of evidence or rational evaluation.'²⁹ As a generalization this claim is simply false. Jesus and the New Testament writers alike appealed to Jesus' miracles as *evidence* for the truth of his personal claims precisely because there was eye-witness testimony for their occurrence. From then

until the present day Christian apologists have presented *evidence based arguments* for miracle claims, most especially for the miracle claim that Jesus rose from the dead. Whether or not these arguments are *sound* is besides the point at hand. The mere fact that arguments are sincerely *offered* is enough to sink Grayling's claim.

Philosophically speaking, it seems to me that if belief in God is reasonable, then a belief in miracles is reasonable, at least in principle. As Ward argued in his paper on the Virgin Birth:

If there is a God ... all the laws of physics and chemistry and so on must be held in being by him. We may well hope that he will continue to allow such laws to operate; otherwise we would never quite know what was going to happen next. But there is no reason at all why he might not sometimes do things which are not predictable from the laws of physics or biology alone. God can do what he wants with his own universe.³⁰

Since it seems to me that belief in God is reasonable, it therefore seems to me that belief in miracles is (in principle) reasonable. One of the reasons it seems to me that belief in God is reasonable is that it offers the best explanation for the existence of the natural world. Indeed, Grayling suggests that perhaps religious people:

need to believe in [supernatural] agencies because they cannot otherwise understand how there can be a natural world – as if invoking 'Chaos and old night' (in one Middle Eastern mythology the progenitors of all things) explained anything, let alone the universe's existence. Doing so might satisfy a pathological metaphysical need for what Paul Davies calls 'the self-levitating super-turtle', but is obviously enough not worth discussing.³¹

I admit that I cannot, besides a belief in some sort of a god, understand how there can be a natural world. However, I do not admit that this is due to some peculiar failure of imagination on my part. Grayling's comments exhibit a frankly astonishing refusal to engage with the complex philosophical issues surrounding various versions of the cosmological argument defended by leading contemporary philosophers of religion (e.g. W. David Beck, William Lane Craig, Alexander R. Pruss, Robert C. Koons ... the list goes on). Grayling's evasion substitutes armchair psycho-

analysis and straw-man references to mythology for rational dialogue.

The question is whether *anyone* (not just 'religious people') can understand how there can be a natural world without a supernatural cause. Cosmological arguments, as the name suggests, *argue* that they cannot, because the most plausible understanding of the existence of the natural world is in fact that there is more to reality than the natural world. Against these arguments, Grayling marshals an unsophisticated chronological snobbery (which C.S. Lewis defined as: 'the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate of our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that count discredited'³² and an offhanded intimation that all theists suffer from some sort of mental block that prevents them sharing in the naturalist's superior insight into the whys and wherefores of reality.

What understanding of how there can be a natural world does Grayling offer? None. He simply asserts that naturalism is true:

no atheist should call himself or herself one ... A more appropriate term is 'naturalist', denoting one who takes it that the universe is a natural realm, governed by nature's laws. This properly implies that there is nothing supernatural in the universe.³³

It certainly *implies* this conclusion; it does not *justify* it. Grayling does write that:

people with theistic beliefs should be called supernaturalists, and it can be left to them to attempt to refute the findings of physics, chemistry and the biological sciences in an effort to justify their alternative claim that the universe was created, and is run, by supernatural beings.³⁴

However, this amounts to yet another assertion because, *at best*, Grayling is simply *assuming* that theism shoulders a burden of proof the atheist does not.

It was British philosopher Antony Flew (who recently became a theist³⁵), who most famously urged that the 'onus of proof must lie upon the theist',³⁶ and that unless compelling reasons for God's existence could be given there should be a 'presumption of atheism'. However, by 'atheism'

Flew meant merely 'non-theism', a non-standard definition of 'atheism' that includes agnosticism but excludes atheism as commonly understood. The presumption of atheism is therefore not particularly interesting unless (as appears to be Grayling's assumption) it really is the presumption of *atheism* rather than the presumption of agnosticism. However, the former is far harder to defend than the latter:

the 'presumption of atheism' demonstrates a rigging of the rules of philosophical debate in order to play into the hands of the atheist, who himself makes a truth claim. Alvin Plantinga correctly argues that the atheist does not treat the statements 'God exists' and 'God does not exist' in the same manner. The atheist assumes that if one has no evidence for God's existence, then one is obligated to believe that God does not exist – whether or not one has evidence *against* God's existence. What the atheist fails to see is that atheism is just as much a claim to know something ('God does not exist') as theism ('God exists'). Therefore, the atheist's denial of God's existence needs just as much substantiation as does the theist's claim; the atheist must give plausible reasons for rejecting God's existence ... in the absence of evidence for God's existence, agnosticism, not atheism, is the logical presumption. Even if arguments for God's existence do not persuade, atheism should not be presumed because atheism is not neutral; pure agnosticism is. Atheism is justified only if there is sufficient evidence against God's existence.'³⁷

As Scott Shalkowski writes: 'suffice it to say that if there were no evidence at all for belief in God, this would [at best] legitimize merely agnosticism unless there is evidence *against* the existence of God.'³⁸

Then again, why would the theist *need* to refute any of the findings of modern science? On the one hand Grayling does not really say *what* he takes the findings of modern science to be; on the other hand he does not explain *why* he thinks those supposed findings are in tension with any particular religious belief. He does explain that he does not take Intelligent Design theory to be among the findings of modern science (as some, including myself, would); but Grayling's definition of Intelligent Design Theory is a straw man (he confuses it with Creationism³⁹ and inaccurately

labels it an argument from ignorance⁴⁰), and his engagement with biologist Michael J. Behe's argument from bio-molecular irreducible complexity is slight, to say the least.⁴¹

Grayling writes that:

In contrast to the utter certainties of faith, a humanist has a humbler conception of the nature and current extent of knowledge. All the enquiries that human intelligence conducts into enlarging knowledge make progress always at the expense of generating new questions.⁴²

I find myself in sympathy with Grayling's 'humble' approach to knowledge; but I wonder if Grayling is even open to the *possibility* that some of those questions thrown up by the progress of knowledge (especially scientific knowledge) might have 'God' as their true answer? If Grayling is not open to this possibility, his protestations of epistemological humility are apt to ring false. If he is open to this possibility, then one wonders what to make of his assertions about the supposed 'slow but bloody retreat of religion'⁴³ in the face of scientific progress? At best, these assertions would have to indicate a tentative, falsifiable inference from available evidence rather than a dogmatic assumption that science and religion are necessarily at odds with religion on the losing side.

In point of fact, Grayling's portrayal of the 'slow but bloody retreat of religion'⁴⁴ is an academic anachronism. As Alister McGrath reports: 'The idea that science and religion are in perpetual conflict is no longer taken seriously by any major historian of science'⁴⁵ Indeed, according to atheist Michael Ruse:

Most people think that science and religion are, and necessarily must be, in conflict. In fact, this 'warfare' metaphor, so beloved of nineteenth-century rationalists, has only a tenuous application to reality. For most of the history of Christianity, it was the Church that was the home of science ...it was not until the seventeenth century, at the time of the Counter-Reformation, that the Catholic Church showed true hostility to science, when it condemned Galileo for his promulgation of Copernican heliocentrism. (Copernicus himself had been not merely a good Catholic, but a priest.) By the nineteenth century,

the Catholic Church had reverted to its traditional role ...it is true that the arrival of evolution, particularly in the form of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, put this tolerance to severe test. But without denying that there were strong opinions on both sides, the truth seems to be that much of the supposed controversy was a function of the imagination of non-believers (especially Thomas Henry Huxley and his friends), who were determined to slay theological dragons whether they existed or not.⁴⁶

Grayling notes that:

Supernaturalists are fond of claiming that some irreligious people turn to prayer when in mortal danger, but naturalists can reply that supernaturalists typically repose great faith in science when they find themselves in (say) a hospital or an aeroplane – and with far greater frequency.⁴⁷

In other words, naturalists may be inconsistent, but theists are more inconsistent. Unfortunately for Grayling, the naturalist who prays in extremis and the supernaturalist who trusts in science in their day to day lives are simply not at all analogous. The naturalist who prays is someone whose action coheres with beliefs that are in contradiction to their everyday beliefs. The supernaturalist who goes into hospital sees no inconsistency between trusting a surgeon and trusting in God, and why should they? Grayling admits that: 'supernaturalists can claim that science itself is a gift of god, and thus justify doing so.'⁴⁸ As Alvin Plantinga writes:

Modern science arose within the bosom of Christian theism; it is a shining example of the powers of reason with which God has created us; it is a spectacular display of the image of God in us human beings. So Christians are committed to taking science and the deliverances of contemporary science with the utmost seriousness.⁴⁹

However, Grayling wants to remind believers that Karl Popper said that: 'a theory that explains everything explains nothing.'⁵⁰ This remark is supposed to reveal the folly of the supernaturalist position. Grayling apparently (it is impossible to be certain) has something like the following argument in mind:

§ A supernaturalist who trusts anything (or perhaps everything) that science tells us is either contradicting their worldview or not

§ If they are contradicting their worldview, their worldview cannot be held consistently and should be shelved

§ If they are not contradicting their worldview, this can only be because their worldview is compatible with whatever the findings of science are or might be

§ But a worldview that is compatible with whatever the findings of science are or might be explains everything and therefore explains nothing

§ A worldview that explains nothing should be shelved

§ Therefore, either way, supernaturalism should be shelved

There are several problems with this argument.

First, if a person cannot consistently live out their worldview on occasion does this *necessarily* mean that their worldview should be shelved (or that it is false)? Should an atheist shelve their atheism the moment they find themselves praying? Consistently un-liveable worldviews are suspect, but un-liveability is a matter of degree, and is at best only indirectly related to the rationality, or truth, of a worldview.

Second, if a supernaturalist is not inconsistent in visiting hospital they are not thereby contradicting anything that they believe science truly has to say about the world; but this does not mean that their worldview is necessarily consistent with *anything* that science might truthfully say about reality. Religious beliefs can and do involve truth-claims that have the potential to conflict with scientific knowledge. For example, the truth-claim that Jesus was resurrected would be in conflict with science if archaeologists ever demonstrably discovered Jesus' bones. There was even a recent, if academically derided and much debunked, claim to this effect.⁵¹

Finally, Grayling applies Popper's remarks out of context – the context being scientific theorising. Metaphysical theories cannot simply be assumed to be subject to the same criteria as scientific theories. Indeed, Popper's remark has to be understood within the context of his falsificationist philosophy of science, a philosophy now largely abandoned by philosophers of science.

Hence, even doing our best to construct the sort of argument Grayling seems to be advancing when he quotes Popper, we find nothing of any substance. Of course, Grayling might be able to construct a more substantial argument to fill out his Popperian place holder; but the very fact that we are forced to do the job for him reveals just how dependent upon unsubstantiated assertion his polemic is.

Conclusion

I agree with Grayling that: 'all who have secure grounds for their views should not be afraid of robust challenge and criticism.'⁵² Unfortunately, Grayling offers next to nothing by way of serious engagement with the purported grounds of any religion, nor of his own 'non-religious outlook'.

Grayling substitutes straw men, red herrings and false dilemmas for the careful accuracy his subject demands; he substitutes sweeping, hasty generalizations for evidence based inferences; and he repeatedly substitutes assertion for argument.

It is frankly disappointing to find a professional philosopher, and one who demands 'that standards of intellectual rigour be upheld at all educational levels'⁵³, failing so singularly to handle the important subject of religion with anything approaching intellectual rigour.

[Go to Part 2]

Recommended Resources (additional to those listed in footnotes)

A.C. Grayling, *Against All Gods* (Oberon Books, 2007)

A.C. Grayling, *The Meaning of Things* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001)

Wikipedia, 'A.C. Grayling'

'Debate: We'd be better off without religion'

John F. Ankerberg (ed.), Gary R. Habermas and Antony G.N. Flew, *Resurrected? An Atheist and Theist Dialogue* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005)

W. David Beck, 'The Cosmological Argument'

Paul Copan & Paul K. Moser (eds.), *The Rationality of Theism* (Routledge, 2003)

William Lane Craig, 'The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe'

William Lane Craig, 'Contemporary Scholarship and the Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus'

William Lane Craig, 'The Problem of Miracles: A Historical and Philosophical Perspective'

R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, *In Defence of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Apollos, 1997)

Gary R. Habermas, 'Why I Believe the New Testament is Historically Reliable'

Gary R. Habermas, 'Why I Believe the Miracles of Jesus Actually Happened'

Robert C. Koons, 'Science and Belief in God: Concord not Conflict' (video)

Robert C. Koons, 'A New Look at the Cosmological Argument'

J.P. Moreland, 'The Historicity of the New Testament'

Tom Price, 'Can you teach an old dog new tricks?'

Alexander R. Pruss, 'A Restricted Principle of Sufficient Reason and the Cosmological Argument'

Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Clarendon Press, 2003)

Peter S. Williams, 'Design and the Humean Touchstone'

1 A.C. Grayling, *Against All Gods* (Oberon Books, 2007) p. 7.

2 Grayling, *Against All Gods*, p. 37.

3 A subject's beliefs can be: true and rational, true

and irrational, false and rational, or false and irrational. For a Christian defence on the *rationality* of faith, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford, 2003)

4 Grayling, *Against All Gods*, p. 37.

5 Scott A. Shalkowski, 'Atheological Apologetics' in R. Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman (eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* (Oxford, 1992) p. 66.

6 William L. Rowe, 'The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979).

7 Grayling, *Against All Gods*, p. 29.

8 Eric S. Waterhouse, *The Philosophical Approach to Religion* (Epworth Press, 1933) p. 20.

9 Grayling, *Against All Gods*, p. 9–10.

10 Grayling, *Against All Gods*, p. 31.

11 Grayling, *Against All Gods*, p. 15–16.

12 J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs, Col.: Navpress, 1997) p. 122.

13 C.S. Lewis, quoted by Norman L. Geisler in the foreword to J.P. Moreland's *Scaling the Secular City* (Grand Rapids, Ill.: Baker, 1987).

14 Tom Price, 15 Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy – A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Ill.: Baker, 1997) p. 73.

16 Grayling, *Against All Gods*, p. 26.

17 John Gray, *Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions*, (Granta, 2004) p. 45.

18 Gray, *Heresies*, p. 46.

19 Piers Benn, 'Is Atheism a Faith Position?', *Think*, Issue 13, Summer 2006, p. 29.

20 James Lazarus, 'A reconsideration of some atheistic arguments'

21 Nigel Warburton, *Thinking: From A to Z*,

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