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BOOK REVIEW

Peter Hitchens. *The Rage against God: How Atheism Led Me to Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010. 224 pp. Hdbk. ISBN 978030320319.

Peter Hitchens is a British journalist. This book is, to me, an amorphous hodgepodge of ideas, reflections, and described experiences, loosely gathered thematically under the captions for each chapter. I was hoping for a much tougher rational argument dealing with (1) why Peter Hitchens became an atheist, (2) why he returned to Christian theism, and (3) the flaws in the arguments of his atheist brother, Christopher Hitchens, and other fundamentalist atheists (such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Chris Hedges). I did not get that tougher argument from my reading of the book. However, there are lots of worthy “nuggets” sandwiched in along the way. For that reason it is worth reading.

Part 1, “A Personal Journey through Atheism,” is a personal “testimony” of Peter Hitchens’s journey into atheism and back to Christianity of the Church of England variety. His reason for returning was fear of a final judgment, generated when he viewed “Roger van der Weyden’s 15th century polyptych *The Last Judgment*” (102). This was no doubt a valid experience for Peter but is not a valid argument to persuade others, least of all atheists, agnostics, or non-theists.

Part 2, “Addressing the Three Failed Arguments of Atheism,” is good, but weak on rational arguments. Unfortunately, this section continues the hodgepodge of ideas, reflections, and described experiences. One needs to read carefully to pick out the good thoughts.

My main disappointments in the book are two: (1) Its engaging title led me to expect stronger arguments for theism and against atheism, especially from someone who has been in both camps. C. S. Lewis, atheist turned Christian theist, did a much better job. Anthony Flew gave a better rationale for his turning from atheism to a form of deism. Peter Hitchens leaves

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the reader hanging in the air. (2) Though I agree with the positions taken by Peter Hitchens in Part 2, I expected to be treated to a much stronger rationale to show that the three key arguments, used by fundamentalist atheists to defend atheism, are false. My agreement with Peter Hitchens is based more on other reading and my own reflections.

Here are the three failed arguments of atheism put forward in Part 2. Drawing partly on Peter's thoughts, but also on my own reflections and readings elsewhere, this is how I see it:

Argument 1: Conflicts fought in the name of religion are conflicts about religion. They are not. They are conflicts generated by flawed human natures and it just happens that, through most of history, human culture has been overwhelmingly religious. Such conflicts were not due to religion *per se* but to flawed human nature. Similar conflicts have also occurred within atheist or quasi-atheist states in the modern world.

Argument 2: It is possible to determine right and wrong without God. It is not. A defensible and valid concept of the divine is required that, of course, takes into account not just religious and philosophical ideas but also the latest discoveries of science, especially physics, and its understanding of the origin, structure, development, and sustaining of both the macro and micro universe. Without an awareness of an overarching, underlying, immanent, and emergent moral structure to the universe and human nature, anything goes as acceptable ethics. It is not enough for an atheist to argue that ethical values arise naturally out of human interactions in the context of a natural environment. If ethical values arise in such a natural way, then there must be some underlying structure to the universe that allows such ethical values to emerge and with which such values are in harmony. Otherwise, there is no control. Ethics becomes what you make it, what you want it to be, thus the atrocities of modern secular atheist or quasi-atheist states—Russian Stalinism, Northern Korea, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, the cultural revolution of China under Chairman Mao, and Nazi Germany. A purely atheistic, secular, and materialistic society has not produced an ethical culture superior to that of religious societies, but it has provided more freedom for flawed human

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nature to perpetuate evil in the name of the state and of the ruling elite.

Argument 3: Atheist states, such as communist states, are not really atheist; they are religious, as evidenced by the personality cults focused on the supreme leaders, and thus the evils they have perpetrated are due to their religiosity not to their atheism. That is not true. It is an incredibly weak argument used by some atheists. Communist states are avowedly and intentionally atheist, secular, and materialistic. Such atheism, devoid of an overarching cosmic moral structure, provides the occasion for flawed human nature to perpetrate evil.

This is an interesting book, but it will largely convince only the already convinced. Better, more persuasive arguments can be found elsewhere. This book is, however, an interesting insight into Peter Hitchens himself.

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