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

In this bold and provocative new book, the author of *In the Beginning* and *The Reenchantment of Nature* challenges the widely held assumption that the world is becoming more secular and demonstrates why atheism cannot provide the moral and intellectual guidance essential for coping with the complexities of modern life.

Atheism is one of the most important movements in modern Western culture. For the last two hundred years, it seemed to be on the verge of eliminating religion as an outmoded and dangerous superstition. Recent years, however, have witnessed the decline of disbelief and a rise in religious devotion throughout the world. In *THE TWILIGHT OF ATHEISM*, the distinguished historian and theologian Alister McGrath examines what went wrong with the atheist dream and explains why religion and faith are destined to play a central role in the twenty-first century.

A former atheist who is now one of Christianity's foremost scholars, McGrath traces the history of atheism from its emergence in eighteenth-century Europe as a revolutionary worldview that offered liberation from the rigidity of traditional religion and the oppression of tyrannical monarchs, to its golden age in the first half of the twentieth century. Blending thoughtful, authoritative historical analysis with incisive portraits of such leading and influential atheists as Sigmund Freud and Richard Dawkins, McGrath exposes the flaws at the heart of atheism, and argues that the renewal of faith is a natural, inevitable, and necessary response to its failures.

*THE TWILIGHT OF ATHEISM* will unsettle believers and nonbelievers alike. A powerful rebuttal of the philosophy that, for better and for worse, has exerted tremendous influence on Western history, it carries major implications for the future of both religion and unbelief in our society.

## **The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World Details**

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# **From Reader Review The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World for online ebook**

## **Tiago says**

I was led to this book due to the sensible and sensitive thinking of the author in the Dawkin's Delusion. I was a bit disappointed to find the persistence of that romantic argument against the enlightenment and its thinkers... that they paved the way to totalitarianism and that their worldview was bankrupt, ready to be replaced. Unfortunately, by the quirks of postmodernism.

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## **Marije says**

This is an informative book about the earlier times of nonbelief and atheism. Unfortunately, McGrath seems to have misjudged the meaning of atheism in current western societies, claiming it experienced its highlights during the sixties and has been on its way back since then. This is where his personal beliefs seem to get in the way of a balanced analysis of modern atheism.

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## **Andrew says**

As a person of faith, I acknowledge my bias but I nevertheless found this to be overall quite fair-minded and even generous in several places concerning its portrayal of atheism. It was a relief to read an intellectual engagement that truly appeared to understand the 'other side' rather than a more typical evangelical 'pop culture' approach that simply says 'Atheist bad, Christian good, everyone else mistaken'. McGrath seemed to be saying 'Come on, atheists, you can do better than this. You've got something good to offer the world, including Christians' (read the last chapter especially).

As for the 'twilight' concept, I don't think he was wise to use the word in the title or the concept in the structure of his book. He acknowledges in the last chapter that atheism, like theism and religion in general, will continue to be a cultural reality in the West for the foreseeable future. The sun is not setting on either one.

Still, it was a fair, informative, respectful, and intellectually engaging (without being intellectually intimidating) read and I do highly recommend it.

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## **Chad Gibbons says**

Alister McGrath's *The Twilight of Atheism* can be broken up into two distinct parts. The first and lengthier of the two could aptly be entitled 'The History of Western Atheism', while the second, something along the lines of 'Speculations about the Future of Atheism'. Divided along these lines, the first section of the book stands out as a terrific run-through of atheism's recent intellectual and political history, while the second section leaves much to be desired.

Alister McGrath, Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford University, (at least at the time of this book's publication) is a worthy tour guide on such a complex historical journey and he does a wonderful job at tying together various strands of thought, while at the same time making sure never to go too far over the reader's head. The political motivation of French atheism in the 18th century, the ideological motivation of German atheism in the 19th century, and the sociological motivation of Russian atheism in the 20th century are all adequately and succinctly explained (for a book of this size), and this is where the book really shines. Any reader new to the subject will have no problem following this vivid history, as well as understanding the theories of thinkers such as Feuerbach, Marx and Freud. This is something McGrath should definitely be commended for.

It is only when the book begins to look at the future of atheism does it begin to lose steam. McGrath's proposal is that atheism is on the decline (hence the title) and that it is losing the battle of the hearts and minds of people on three different fronts: 1) Lack of organization and leadership, 2) Pentecostalism, and 3) Postmodernism. Sadly, this three pronged attack fails to convince that the 'twilight of atheism' is upon us.

Lack of atheist leadership and organization is perhaps the greatest thing going against the current atheist movement. McGrath uses Madalyn Murray-O'Hair as the proof text for this point, and although this is perhaps a tad too anecdotal, his point is still heard. While millions of Christians meet every single week for moral reinforcement, encouragement and fellowship, atheism can only offer a handful of books here and there, normally written by people who come off as more pious and arrogant than even the worst televangelist. Hardly anything one can organize a successful group around.

The other two arguments against the popularity of atheism (Pentecostalism and Postmodernism) are more than a little lacking. Although it cannot be denied that Pentecostalism, with over half a billion adherents worldwide, has certainly made a tremendous impact, McGrath gives no evidence whatsoever that these growing numbers of Pentecostals are having an inverse affect on atheist numbers. To the contrary, Pentecostals usually gain followers from people who already consider themselves to be 'religious'.

Finally, McGrath sites the fall of modernism and the rise of postmodernism as another reason that atheism is doomed to failure. Here is where the book falls flat on its face. To claim that atheism is negatively affected by the rise of postmodernism is not only to claim too much, but to claim the very opposite of what is actually taking place. McGrath's major error can be summed up in the following quote taken from the concluding chapter of his book:

"Atheism is wedded to philosophical modernity, and both are aging gracefully in the cultural equivalent of the old folks' home."

This is simply untrue. Atheism is not wedded to philosophical modernity. A quick survey of the major postmodern writers can confirm this: every single one of them is an atheist. Rather than being the bane of atheism, postmodernism is acting as a veritable atheist breeding ground. While McGrath praises postmodernism for being open to religious ideas in a way that modernism never was, there is a sinister corollary to this that is not mentioned: To say that all religions are equally valid, basically amounts to saying that none of them are really true. This is something that is far more at home in an atheist worldview than a Christian one.

Aside from these objections, the book remains an excellent primer on the history of atheism in the western world. And although McGrath fails to convince on a few different points, the compelling (and disheartening) thought that the reader is left with by the end of the book can not be denied, which is this: The single greatest contributor to the growth of atheism over the years is, and always has been, the failure of the church. This, I think, is very sad, but very true.

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### **Donald says**

I have read several essays and have heard lectures by McGrath over the past couple of years. His credentials are formidable and his philosophical reasoning is articulate and sound. He is an Anglican scholar and professor of Historical Theology at Oxford University.

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~mcgrath/>

McGrath is aware of historical/cultural milieu. He writes of the salient junctures in Western intellectual history that brought modern atheism into a credible worldview. His orientation is from a British standpoint, but has a fair and competent grasp of "the west" in general. He takes the reader through Feuerbach, Freud, and Marx, the French Revolution, and British atheism. He only occasionally mentions the "new atheism," as the "Four Horsemen" had t yet to their mark on the contemporary literary scene.

I give it three stars because he gives a bit too much credit to the post-modern context. Personally, I have a penchant for modernity, since the newer alternative is self-refuting from the get-go. Despite quantum theory (which no one gets - even Feinman) one thing cannot be true if it's exact opposite is true. In other words, the Aristotelean construct is as true today as it was when he articulated it. The law of non contradiction lives -- discourse has no meaning otherwise, The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World is an interesting and convincing look at the problem atheism faces now, and for some time to come.

But it is not over. Atheism offers something romantic and liberating, but it also has a more serious problem dealing with the modernistic view of "truth" even though modernity led us into the destructive paths it laid in the last century. Yet, true means true and false means false. I am a programmer and cannot get out of that pesky problem.

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### **Amanda Birdwell says**

Pretty uneven --I enjoyed reading it, and learned a lot, but I don't think McGrath is successful at tracing a coherent history of atheism in the first place, and he seems to give 20th century atheist and secular movements and culture very little consideration -- focusing on Madelyn Murray and the American Atheists to the near-exclusion of either other organized atheist and secular movements or the large body of Americans and Europeans who identify as non-believers but are not involved in atheist organizations. I was disappointed that McGrath seemed as willing to oversimplify atheism as Dawkins, Harris, etc, are to oversimplify religion -- especially since McGrath pays lip service to respecting atheist thought.

I think the biggest failing of the book's structure is that McGrath adds so many caveats to his analysis of eighteenth and nineteenth century atheistic writing and culture that, while he refers to these centuries as its heyday, the book doesn't bear this out. In that sense, he's not really telling the story of the rise and fall of atheism at all. He reads everyone, from Voltaire to Paine to George Eliot, as critics of organized religion rather than actual disbelievers in God. This may have been the case -- if nothing else, I now have a fat reading list of primary and secondary sources -- and his ideas about "atheism" as a cultural phenomenon during these periods are interesting, but it also means that the book never really addresses "real" atheists or arguments for the nonexistence of God. I think this needs to be either addressed separately from arguments about the role of religion in society (which ultimately is the concern of most of the book), or, if rational argument about whether or not God exists is pointless -- which he suggests, and which I believe -- I think he needs to frame this entire project differently.

He also has almost no data to back up his claim that atheism is on the decline -- his points that Pentecostalism is growing worldwide and that American culture has become more religious over the past decades are not the same thing as demonstrating that fewer people adhere to atheism. I enjoyed what I read and I don't think any of it was irrelevant, other than a bizarre segueway into Star Trek plot lines from the 1960s through the 1990s, but it didn't really accomplish what he set out to do. I think a more useful project would seriously consider arguments for the nonexistence of God, even if it meant giving a platform to ideas that can't be argued against. If you really believe that the impossibility of a rational argument for God's existence is compatible with your belief in God -- a view that I think McGrath does explain successfully here -- I think you can afford to be more candid and thorough in treating atheism as it stands today. I suspect, though, that that might destroy McGrath's premise (that atheism is on its way out) entirely.

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### **Anastasia Alén says**

Sinänsä paljon hyvää faktaa mutta kaikki kirjailijan käyttämät viittaukset jäävät puoliksi kuin sumun peittoon + huono suomennos? koska onhan 'His Dark Materials' käännetty suomeksikin (en tajunnut miten viimeisen osan otsikko on taivaallinen tasavalta?) Sinänsä mielenkiintoista historiaa mutta mielenkiintoista miten kirjailija kirjoittaa ateismista samalla myöntäen olevansa teisti.

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### **Stephen Hiemstra says**

Religion is composed of our core beliefs. Just like every house must begin with a foundation, these core beliefs, hence religion, are not optional—everyone has them. Atheism, which means no gods[1], is a particularly curious religion because it is defined by what it is not. In this sense, it is parasitic drawing its strength from its host [2]. Because the line of argumentation in atheism is much longer than for traditional

religions, atheism requires more intellectual energy to maintain. Nevertheless, atheism is popular because it makes fewer practical demands of its followers than traditional religions[3]. For that reason new flavors of atheism keep popping up like ticks on a dog.

Alister McGrath begins his book, *Twilight of Atheism*, with a citation from Winston Churchill: “The empires of the future will be empires of the mind.” Atheism is one of these empires which he defines as: “rejection of any divinities, supernatural powers, or transcendent realities limiting the development and achievements of humanity.” (xi)[4].

McGrath states his purpose in writing as:

“To tell something of the story of the rise and fall of a great empire of the mind and what can be learned from it. What brought it into existence? What gave it such credibility and attractiveness for so long? And why does it seem to have lost so much of its potency in recent years?” (vii).

McGrath has in view, not every form of atheism, but rather official state atheism that began its ascent with the fall of the Bastille in 1789 and crashed with the Berlin Wall in 1989. McGrath goes on to write:

“The fall of the Bastille became a symbol of the viability and creativity of a godless world, just as the fall of the Berlin Wall later symbolized a growing recognition of the uninhabitability of such a place.” (1)

Dr. Alister McGrath is the Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion at the University of Oxford and, most recently, the new Gresham Professor of Divinity[5]. The *Twilight of Atheism* is an expansion of a speech given at Oxford Union in February 2002 (xiii). He writes in 11 chapters divided into two parts—The High Noon of Atheism (chapters 2-6 and *Twilight* (chapters 7-11). The chapters are:

The Dawn of the Golden Age of Atheism,  
The French Revolution,  
The Intellectual Foundations: Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud,  
Warfare: The Natural Sciences and the Advancement of Atheism,  
A Failure of the Religious Imagination: The Victorian Crisis of Faith,  
The Death of God: The Dream of a Godless Culture,  
The Unexpected Resurgence of Religion,  
Disconnection from the Sacred: Protestantism and Atheism,  
Postmodernity: Atheism and Radical Cultural Change,  
The Atheist’s Revolt: Madalyn Murray O’Hair and Others, and  
End of Empire: The Fading Appeal of Atheism (v-vii).  
These chapters are preceded by an introduction and followed by a list of references and an index.

Like another other religion, atheism has its priests. McGrath writes:

“Intellectuals became a secular priesthood, unfettered by the dogmas of the religious past, addressing a growing audience who were becoming increasingly impatient with the moral failures and cultural unsophistication of their clergy. At some point, perhaps one that can never be determined with historical accuracy, Western society came to believe that it should look elsewhere than to its clergy for guidance. Instead, they turned to the intellectuals, who were able to portray their clerical opponents as lazy fools who could do no more than unthinkingly repeat the slogans and nostrums of an increasingly distant past.” (49)

Ouch! My guess is that the Scopes Trial in 1925[6] was probably a tipping point for American



characterization of clergy as unsophisticated.

The idea in my mind that atheism was a real religion was planted by McGrath's discussion here . McGrath writes:

"the philosophical argument about the existence of God has ground to a halt. The matter lies beyond rational proof, and is ultimately a matter of faith, in the sense of judgments made in the absence of sufficient evidence...The belief that there is no God is just as much a matter of faith as the belief that there is a God."(179-180)

In other words, atheism is a religion. The reason why we care about this characterization is that religions dressed up as something other than what they really are has important implications for other atheistic religions that followed and transformed postmodern culture. For example, a non-religion, religion can be taught in public schools while a formal religion cannot be taught. Unmasking the priests of an informal religion is a critical point in responding to their claims.

Alister McGrath's book, *Twilight of Atheism*, is an erudite but accessible and fascinating read. It is refreshing to see such clear and logical writing.

This is the first of a three-part review which will be posted on T2Pneuma.net beginning on May 18 and running through May 25, 2015. In part 2 I will focus on McGrath's *High Noon* of atheism in terms of 3 key personalities—Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. Then, in part 3, I will turn to McGrath's view of the *Twilight of Atheism*.

[1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism>

[2] McGrath writes: "Voltaire's insight is of fundamental importance to our study of the emergence of atheism. His argument is simple: the attractiveness of atheism is directly dependent upon the corruption of Christian institutions. Reform those institutions and the plausibility of atheism is dramatically reduced." (27)

[3] This is unlike Christianity, for example, which requires that believers model their lives after Christ. Following a review of the sadistic and salacious work of the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), McGrath notes that "Atheism made sexual experimentation legitimate and interesting." (35) In other words, rather than making demands of its followers, atheism offers them a kinky sort of freedom.

[4] Limiting is the key word here because a brief survey of any television guide will leave one in awe of the number of supernatural illusions referenced. However, like other pagan gods before them, zombies, ghosts, witches, wizards, werewolves, and vampires make no particular demands on those that believe in them and model their lives after them. Instead, they offer the illusion of eternal life and supernatural power without accountability.

[5] <http://alistermcgrath.weebly.com>

[6] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scopes\\_T...](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scopes_T...)

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## **Kris says**

Very detailed. A bit dry. Still excellent scholarship.

This topic is considered from the perspective of a highly educated upper-class British intellectual, and while there's some mention of France, Germany, and American movements, there always seems to be a British point of view present. The language is quite elevated at times, and there's lots of scrutinization and even reporting of dry facts. McGrath's dry humor leaks into the prose as well, a welcome addition to the detached academic tone. Yet I still absolutely love McGrath's voice, no matter what the topic.

Sometimes it feels like he's getting a little off topic from the chapter title, winding his way freely through names and dates and works. But eventually he comes back to the point. He has practically enough subtitles to guide any confounded reader through Mino's maze -- I felt like he was micromanaging the discussion a bit. But is that such a bad thing, considering the seriousness of the topic? Maybe not. But I found myself wanting a more casual conversation rather than the dry, detailed, detached lecture from a professor.

Then again, that's exactly what this book set out to be: expansions on previous lectures from a British professor. I did enjoy expanding my knowledge of the wave of atheism in Western culture. For instance, I liked learning more about how the Victorians drastically changed in their religious beliefs and specifically how science and religion were drawn up to be seen as incompatible opposites. There are certain paragraphs with very poignant prose and sound points that I wish more people could understand. I would recommend this to someone who could appreciate this point of view.

I don't see that Atheism has died quite as much as McGrath would seem to believe, but still a good work.

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## **Andreas Beccai says**

Allister McGrath is a well respected Oxford Theologian and as such his material deserves to be taken seriously. *Twilight of Atheism* is a book that chronicles the history of atheism with the ultimate goal of proving its demise. McGrath compares atheism to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in June 1897, in that it was the pinnacle for the British Empire, and the only direction thereafter was down. *Twilight* is not a rant against atheism, neither is it particularly apologetic in its tone. When reading through the book, the author is firm but respectful of those that hold the opposing view (one obvious way that he does this is in the title that seems to be a play on Nietzsche's "*Twilight of the Idols*.")

Overall *Twilight of Athesim* was an excellent book to read. McGrath is an engaging writer who demystified atheism by placing it in its context like any other movement, and gave credence to those of us who uphold a theistic view of the world.

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## **Nicholas Whyte says**

<http://nwhyte.livejournal.com/1430527.html>

Yet another book on religion where I basically agree with the author but found the book itself really

unsatisfactory.

Basically, McGrath seemed to me to be asking the wrong question. His argument identifies 'atheism' as a collective identity more than is really warranted by his own evidence; towards the end he seems to almost criticize atheists for not being as well organised as the Church, which sort of misses the point. More widely, he never makes it clear whose atheism or belief is under discussion, though I felt that in the present day he really just means Oxford dons. Non-Christian faiths are barely mentioned; there is an anecdote about the triumph of Christianity in Korea in the 20th century which simply does not refer to other religions practised by Koreans. This really isn't good enough.

The internal structure puzzled me as well. I would have preferred a more strictly chronological organisation. But instead we have a chapter on Feuerbach, Marx and Freud, followed by one on the sciences post-Darwin, followed by an examination of atheism in classic literature from the Enlightenment on (that last being one of the better chapters in the book). It is as if Freud knew nothing of Darwin, and Darwin knew nothing of Keats. (I confess I had not previously heard of Feuerbach, but that may just be my ignorance.)

Other irritations: James II was not Charles II's son (p 14). I was surprised to read (p 264-265) that 'The role of religion in creating and sustaining communal identity has been known for some considerable time, and has become increasingly important since about 1965'; I think it's just possible that religion played an important role in creating and sustaining communal identity for quite a long time prior to that date.

I suspect that this book was intended to be in part a rebuttal to Richard Dawkins, who is very briefly dissected, but unfortunately it is too full of its own complacency to be effective.

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## **Robert Pajer says**

In the *Twilight of Atheism*, Alister McGrath gives readers a historical overview of atheism that includes its strengths and its flaws. His analysis is both insightful and honest without disrespect to the many great minds that believe in a godless universe. McGrath, as a Reformation scholar, even suggests, by drawing together a number of scholarly studies on the origins and development of Protestantism, that there is a significant link between the Reformation and the emergence of atheism.

He reminds atheists, who seem to forget, that "The belief that there is no God is just as much a matter of faith as the belief there is a God. If 'faith' is defined as 'belief lying beyond proof,' both Christianity and atheism are faiths. While this suggestion may seem astonishing to some atheists, it is not only philosophically correct but also illuminating in shedding light on the changed fortunes of atheism in recent years."

For those who think one cannot be a legitimate scientist and still have a belief in God, McGrath cites a major survey of the religious beliefs of scientists carried out at the beginning and end of the 20th Century. The original survey taken in 1916 showed that 40 percent of scientists had some form of personal religious beliefs while 40 percent had none and 20 percent were agnostic. In 1996 the survey was repeated and the amazing results were exactly the same. One noted scientist, Albert Einstein, denied being an atheist.

Walter Isaacson in his biography of Albert Einstein writes this about the great scientist beliefs, "Throughout his life, he (Einstein) was consistent in deflecting the charge that he was an atheist. 'There are people who say there is no God,' he told a friend. 'But what makes me really angry is that they quote me for support of such views.'" Isaacson also writes of an interview Einstein gave to George Sylvester Viereck shortly after his fiftieth birthday. Viereck asked Einstein if he believed in God and Einstein said, "I'm not an atheist. The problem involved is too vast for our limited minds. We are in the position of a little child entering a huge

library filled with books in many languages. The child knows someone must have written these books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of the most intelligent human being toward God. We see the universe marvelously arranged and obeying certain laws but only dimly understand these laws."

The reality is that there are no definitive answers on either side of the debate, so it comes down to a person making a choice as to what they believe. My problem is with the name calling that has recently been evident in the atheist camp. This new tactic takes the position that if you can't prove something empirically then you need to verbally bludgeon the opposition by name calling such as: simple-minded, stupid, imbecilic, and other deprecatory rhetoric. This has become one of Richard Dawkins weapons against theistic belief.

George Orwell in his novel *Down and Out in Paris and London* describes the character of Bozo in this way, 'He was an embittered atheist (the sort of atheist who does not so much disbelieve in God as personally dislike Him). This seems to describe Dawkins's recent diatribes against religion

McGrath, at the end of the book, takes a more reasonable stand. He says this about the attitude believers need to have, "Atheism stands in permanent judgment over arrogant, complacent, and superficial Christian churches and leaders. It needs to be heard. In the closing pages of this work, its concerns will be taken seriously and to heart."

The debate, I'm sure, will continue with no definitive answers ever achieved, so perhaps it is more civil to have each side simply respect the others beliefs and let the condescending name calling finally end.

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## **Matthew says**

With numerous books which explore religion from a sociological standpoint, trying to explain believer's faith through economic, social, or other causes, it is good to see atheism receiving a similar treatment. Alister McGrath, a former atheist turned Christian theologian, explores the history of atheism, building a case for its rising popularity and success in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as its subsequent(?) decline. He credits three individuals: Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud for the intellectual background and then shows how religion (specifically Christianity) failed at particular points to fully satisfy people's needs, such as in science or the imagination, leaving an opportunity for atheism to take the cultural mantle.

The book reads like a popular intellectual history, and some of its main points are interesting. Given the style of the main argument, however, there are some obvious unanswered questions. What about the rise of atheism in non-Christian countries (for example, communist China)? Where their religions also failing them? McGrath proposed that the rise of atheism was a worldwide phenomenon, then keeps his analysis focused on Western Europe and the US. There are some times, also, when the consistency of the argument seems to suffer, for example, in the 1960s, was the "death of God" movement a serious perception or wasn't it? He seems to say both.

All in all, it gives some useful data countering popular notions that belief in God is dwindling. As a rough overview, it works well, but this is a topic on which much more could be said. And more recent bestsellers are opening the question if atheism is really declining at all.

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## **David says**

McGrath traces the rise of atheism as a major cultural force in the West in the first half of this book. Atheism rose to prominence in part through the French Revolution and its significant critique of the failings of the French Church, the intellectual ideas of Feuerbach, Marx and Freud who all critique belief in God as a flaw in humanity, and the rise of natural science (specifically evolution). Also contributing was the failure of religious imagination; atheism was simply more interesting and invigorating to people. This led to the dream of a godless culture, which some yearned for but others were more uncertain about.

The second part of the book examines the resurgence of religion. McGrath gives many reasons for this. One is the emergence of Pentecostalism, a form of Christianity that is seemingly immune to some previous atheist attacks. Here McGrath advances the thesis that atheism rose in part as a culturally conditioned critique of Protestantism. While aspects of Protestantism set the stage for the atheist critique, as Christianity changes and evolves, such critiques no longer hold water. Also, when the godless cultures that many atheists previously yearned for did arrive, such as in communist Russia, they proved to be just as oppressive, intolerant and violent as the worst that any religious culture ever was. The decline of modernity and the rise of postmodernism played a part in the critique of atheism too. Finally, atheism failed to capture the imagination of people.

McGrath brings even-handedness and sanity to a debate often dominated by loud rhetorical flourish. He argues that the truth of God's existence cannot be proven nor disproven, it lies outside the realm of proof and certainty. Just as the arguments for God by the likes of Aquinas and Augustine presupposed God and then explained reality with God in mind, so Freud and Marx presupposed no God and went on to explain reality from an atheist perspective. McGrath is no arrogant theist saying all signs point to God, but he does show that rejection of God is not the default for any person with a brain.

This book came out prior to the onslaught of attacks on religion by the "new atheists". With so many bestsellers, perhaps some see McGrath's thesis of atheism in its twilight as proven false. Yet McGrath is somewhat prophetic as the newer atheists come across, even to many other atheists, as fundamentalists who as culture turns against them feel the need to draw hard battle lines, yell the loudest and win the argument by sheer force of rhetoric. It gets attention in the media, but on closer examination lacks depth of substance.

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## **David Ryan says**

Read this with my reading partner - his choice - but I am glad to have read it. Feel more informed about the history of atheism - how it evolved, grew and why now in decline. IF you do not have a dynamic personal relationship with God, then of course your religion does not do much for you! Glad to have an intimate relationship with God through Christ, knowing in my depth that i am loved.

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