

Review of "Who Made God: Searching for a theory of everything"

By Edgar Andrews (Darlington, England: EP Books, 2009), kindle edition

Andrews has produced a book which deserves a wide readership—especially among thoughtful Christians. For one, the book is a veritable *tour de force* exposure of the main problems inherent in the recent popular attempts by atheists to explain the world around us without the need of God. If that weren't enough to merit its consideration, the book exhibits a rare combination of searching logic, witty observation, familiarity with the arguments, thoroughness, penetrating clarity, and charity for alternate views which make for a profitable and enjoyable read.

Rather than setting about to debunk a particular atheist author or book of late, the author takes a refreshing approach: evaluating various aspects of reality both from an atheistic point of view and also that of a Biblical theist—against “the hypothesis of God.” The reality which Andrews seeks to describe is more full-orbed than that which the atheists typically consider, including attributes which are especially difficult for a purely materialistic view of reality to account for:

the scientist's dream is to develop a ‘theory of everything’ — a scientific theory that will encompass all the workings of the physical universe in a single self-consistent formulation. Fair enough, but there is more to the universe than matter, energy, space and time. Most of us believe in the real existence of non-material entities such as friendship, love, beauty, poetry, truth, faith, justice and so on — the things that actually make human life worth living. A true ‘theory of everything’, therefore, must embrace both the material and non-material aspects of the universe, and my contention is that we already possess such a theory, namely, the hypothesis of God. [par. 35]

The ‘hypothesis of God’ means that the assumption ‘God exists’ is a starting point for enquiry of all kinds — historical, theological, scientific, aesthetic and more. Any attempt to lock God up in a box, whatever its shape, will inevitably lead to contradictions and failed hypotheses. It's like replacing a house (three dimensional) by the architect's plans of the house (two dimensional) and then trying to open the front door and step inside. By removing any of the ‘dimensions’ of God — by including him entirely within the material world or diligently excluding him from it — we reduce the hypothesis of God to a caricature of God. [par. 902]

Since Andrews treats God as a hypothesis, he is free to choose whatever representation or concept of God he wants—and then evaluate different attributes of reality against his particular hypothesis. As a committed Christian (and accomplished scientist), he chooses the God of the Bible:

the hypothesis of God is a foundation on which to build — an assumption that leads to a whole host of conclusions that can be tested against human experience including (but by no means limited to) scientific observations. It may come as a surprise to learn that the Bible begins in exactly this way. Its

opening words are, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’ (Genesis 1:1). The first four words constitute an assumption that someone called ‘God’ exists and is sufficiently real to have created the real universe (the Hebrew word ‘created’ implying ‘creation out of nothing’ — *creatio ex nihilo*). That’s quite an assumption; it is in fact the hypothesis of God. [par. 908]

As Andrews considers various questions in the light of his hypothesis, he touches upon a wide range of ideas and considerations which bring clarity to the debate concerning the origin of the universe and mankind.

Andrews' general pattern is to identify an attribute of reality (e.g., matter, energy, truth, justice, language), consider how atheists attempt to explain its origin and operation, and then to evaluate it against his “hypothesis of God.” In each case, he shows that his hypothesis of (the Biblical) God provides a superior explanation to that of atheism. In other words, given the attributes of reality—both material and non-material—the Biblical revelation of God provides the needed explanatory power in comparison with the stance that the Biblical God does not exist.

When discussing aspects of reality such as entropy, love, law, communication, and justice, Andrews appeals to the Biblical explanation of the fallen nature of man and the resulting cursed condition of the universe such that the gospel naturally enters the presentation—but not in a “preachy” way. The work is apologetic in every sense: both in its appeal as an explanation of reality, but also in its recognition of the fractured state of the creation, the need for its subsequent restoration centered in the work of Jesus on the cross, and the implications on a personal level.

He is especially good at identifying flawed assumptions which often underlie atheist arguments. For example: in asking the question “Who Made God?” – as if those who identify God as the prime-mover are on the hook to explain who or what caused God:

Because cause and effect is only proven for the physical world, we can no longer insist that cause and effect are relevant when it comes to the origin of a spiritual entity like God. Therefore God doesn’t have to have a cause — he can be the ultimate uncaused cause, a being whom no one made. [par. 295-297]

The atheist assumes that nothing exists beyond the material, but then fallaciously attempts to reason beyond the material realm using laws and concepts which are derived purely from within the material realm. This proves to be one of several Achilles heels for the atheist.

Andrews is also insightful when addressing the limitations of science and evaluating its proud claims of having “solved” and “explained” so much of the world around us in a material way such that we know “understand” what was once a mystery requiring God:

science can describe the fundamental structures of matter, energy, space and

time but can hardly be said to explain them. [par. 323]

far from explaining everything, science actually ‘explains’ nothing. What science does is describe the world and its phenomenology in terms of its own specialized concepts and models — which provide immensely valuable insights but become increasingly non-intuitive as we dig ever deeper into the nature of physical reality. [par. 341.]

A genuine explanation, I suggest, would consist of a train of reasoning that leads back only to premises that are intuitive or self-evident. But scientific ‘explanations’ definitely don’t do that. [par. 372]

Along the way, Andrews touches upon aspects of physics (both astro- and sub-atomic), quantum theory, string theory, and other concepts frequenting many of the latest popular-level treatments of the physics. He also notes that as physics and cosmology delve ever deeper into the mysteries of the nature of reality, the proposed explanations become more complex and less intuitive in their explanatory power.

But beware; the ‘explanation’ or simplification achieved by string theory comes at an incredible price in credibility — there is nothing here remotely resembling the self-evident end-point that would denote an honest-to-goodness explanation. I already said that for all this to work, the strings themselves have to be so tiny as to be almost non-existent. You would need 10^{26} of them end to end to stretch from one side of an atom to the other — that’s not 1,000,000 of them or even 1,000,000,000 of them, but ‘one followed by 26 zeros’ of them. That’s an awful lot of strings though not, of course, all that much string. Needless to say, we have no hope of ever actually seeing such strings — we can only infer their existence from the success of the theory (or their non-existence if the theory fails). Oh, and that’s not all. For these strings to ‘do their stuff’ they must exist not in one dimension like any self-respecting thread, nor in the three dimensions of space, and not even in the four dimensions of space-time. They must wriggle around in ten, eleven or even twenty-six dimensions (take your pick) depending on the version of string theory you prefer. Now there’s magic for you! Or perhaps it’s just a conjuring trick? No, it’s called physics and a great deal of serious and expensive research is being devoted to it at this very moment., [par. 665.]

The author’s wit and wry humor are easily seen in numerous passages, including the following which discusses the oft-heard just-so explanation of the critical role of science in dispelling the darkness and superstition of the past:

The argument goes like this. During the aeons before science (let’s call this period BS) human beings were incredibly primitive and ignorant. They understood very little about the world in which they lived and certainly could give no logical explanations for the phenomena they observed or the experiences they underwent. However (giving credit where credit is due) they

found a simple and ingenious solution — they invented one or more invisible deities and blamed him (or them) for anything they couldn't understand. Thus 'God' comfortably filled the gaps in their knowledge — though this was not too obvious at first because, of course, they were so stupid that their 'knowledge' consisted entirely of gaps. With the dawn of modern science (*anno scientiae* or AS) from the seventeenth century onwards, all this began to change. The stars and planets ceased to be chess pieces manipulated by a capricious deity and were found to obey simple mathematical laws. All kinds of other natural phenomena were similarly explained as they yielded to scientific enquiry. The final mystery — that of life itself and the nature of man — eventually evaporated like mist before the rising sun of Darwinian evolution. One by one, the gaps in human knowledge that once could only be filled by invoking God have been filled instead by science, and God has been declared redundant. This, at least, is the narrative we are urged to accept as universal truth today. Predicated as it is upon man's universal ignorance prior to AS, this scenario puts me in mind of Mark Twain's wry comment about his dad: 'When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years.' However, evidently, science hasn't yet finished the gap-elimination job. Even the most hubristic atheism accepts that some gaps still remain in our knowledge, into which religious souls will go on squeezing God. Little things, like what caused the universe; how life arose; what evolutionist Theodore Dobzhansky called 'the biological uniqueness of man'; and the whole question of human morality and the meaning of life. But of course, these are mere details and materialistic science will eventually come up with answers to all these questions leaving no gaps for God to fill. Like Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat, he will vanish away, leaving only the smile (or frown?) behind. [par. 1261-1275]

This view of the deity is a parody on religion that has never been embraced by thinking man. As we saw in the previous chapter, when Johannes Kepler discovered the mathematical laws of planetary motion he didn't say, 'Well, that's one less thing to explain by appeal to God.' Instead, he claimed that the very laws he had discovered were the 'thoughts' of a transcendent Deity. [par. 1281]

The book is anything but a dry read! :-)

I especially enjoyed Andrews' evaluation of Richard Dawkins' contention that even miraculous events, such as the hand of a marble statue moving spontaneously, are possible *given enough time*. This is a variation of the standard argument among evolutionary authors that no matter how unlikely an event, it *will* happen given a long enough time such that exceedingly small probability becomes certainty. (They need naturalistic explanations for such "miracles" in order to assert that life began spontaneously from non-life by chance.) Andrews shows that various real-world factors

make Dawkins' example completely implausible.

One area where I disagreed with the author was in regard to his adoption of an old universe/old earth position and presentation of the Big Bang theory as being compatible with Genesis. (He takes the standard long-age 'escape' of denying the creation of the sun, moon, and stars on day 4—holding that they were created earlier and merely became visible on earth on the fourth day.) But these matters do not detract much from the book because they are not directly related to most of the material under consideration.

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