



Dorset Humanists

Chairman's View

February 2012



In March and April we are looking forward to staging our 'Atheists v Christians' debates at Bournemouth University. This kind of debate has become extremely popular worldwide with the likes of Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins going head-to-head with Christian defenders such as John Lennox and William Lane Craig. Have you been keeping up with the God debate? In the years 2006-2007, a number of anti-religious books ignited a global debate about God. These books included Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* (2006), Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell* (2007), Sam Harris's *The End of Faith* (2006) and Christopher Hitchens's *God is Not Great* (2007). Even John Humphreys of the *Today* programme pitched in with his agnostic's apology *In God We Doubt* (2007). More recently, Professor Stephen Hawking has come on-side with his book *The Grand Design* (2011) which dispenses with the God hypothesis.

In recent years there's been a forceful Christian backlash against the so-called 'new atheists'. The big hitters include Alister McGrath, Professor of Theology at King's College London, Keith Ward, former Professor of Divinity at Oxford, and John Lennox, Professor of Mathematics in the University of Oxford. Their books include Keith Ward's *Why There Almost Certainly Is a God: Doubting Dawkins* (2008), Alister McGrath's *Why God Won't Go Away: Engaging with the New Atheism* (2011), and John Lennox's *Gunning for God: A Critique of the New Atheism* (2011). Humanists and atheists should be reading these books to see what we are up against and to guard against the accusation that we only attack 'easy and lazy caricatures of religion' and that we 'fail to articulate a positive and compelling approach of our own' (Alister McGrath). Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has written 'I am troubled by the rancour that has entered the debate in recent years... vituperative atheists and militant religious extremists' and Michael Novak in the US has pleaded that 'atheists and believers can and should open civil, reasoned conversations about questions important to each.' We'll certainly be doing our best to be civil and reasonable and I trust you are doing your homework.

David Warden