

Review: Louis Markos, *Atheism on Trial: Refusing the Modern Arguments Against God*, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR, 2018

Pages: 282

Prosecuting A Good Case

Markos traces today's false philosophies back to empiricism and materialism of the ancient Greeks, showing there is nothing new under the sun.

Its astutely identifies the modern secularised worldview, "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD)", which for many 'Christians' is just anthropomorphising God, and claiming the good works will guarantee one heaven upon death.

Unfortunately, the author shows a worrying blind spot for the false cult of Roman Catholicism (e.g., "His Holiness the Pope").

Introduction: Nothing New Under the Sun (pp. 7-14)

Thales advocated strict empiricism and moral relativism.

Epicurean Lucretius was an Evolutionist.

Stoic Marcus Aurelius believed in goodness without God.

Marcion labelled the God of the Old Testament as a moral monsters so only kept the New Testament.

In the 17thC, Spinoza replaced God with nature itself.

The standard arguments: everything can be explained by natural causes; nature is a closed system; miracles are impossible; empiricism is true; there are no absolutes.

Atheists deny God's goodness, power, and direct involvement in history. They also hold man is a product of his environment, and is good by nature.

I) In the Beginning (pp. 15-37)

Greek mythology held nature (undifferentiated chaos) created both gods and men. As such, they are products of chaos.

Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes were the *Milesians*.

Thales first held the *arche* was material, then specifically water, from which earth, air, and fire were derived. His pupil Anaximander said the *arche* was an amorphous, ancient mass.

Anaximenes said it was air; through "rarefaction", earth made water, it may air, and this made fire. The opposite also occurred with fire eventually making earth.

The above is reductionist thinking, ending with Leucippus and Democritus who said only atoms ("not-cutttable") and the void existed.

The materialist's desire is over 2,000 years old: construct a materialistic system sans supernatural guidance, influence, or purpose.

Lucretius said an accidental swerve of one atom caused the primeval collision and triggering creation; Darwin's blind natural selection selected changes to be passed on; neo-Darwinians insist random mutations are the creative force.

Lucretius: "This fright, this night of the mind must be dispelled ... by the face of nature and her laws."

"Materialistic systems are constructed to avoid divine accountability."

In Book I of *De Rarum Natura*, Lucretius claimed the laws of nature are eternal.

Contingent beings cannot create themselves, and without a First Mover, the only option is an infinite regress.

II) The Laws of Nature (pp. 39-62)

The laws of nature don't do anything, they simply define, measure, and explain underlying unknown phenomena.

Epicurus: "Truly this universe has always been such as it now is, and so it shall always be."

Laws which were not impersonal would become gods.

Marx believed history was somehow capable of agency, moving towards the ultimate climax of Communist revolution.

In 1656, Benedict de Spinoza was excommunicated from his Amsterdam synagogue. He is the forgotten founding father of the new atheists.

Spinoza: "If things could have been different ... the order of Nature would have been different, then God's nature, too, could have been other than it now is ... therefore this other Nature would have to exist meaning two Gods, which is absurd."

Anaxagoras' *nous* (mind) was a spiritual but not divine material of the universe.

For Aristotle, every stone, plant and animal has a *telos*.

Balbus the Stoic: "When we see some example of a mechanism, such as a globe or clock or some other device, do we doubt that it is the creation of a conscious intelligence?" [p59]

Albert Einstein: "The idea of a personal God is an anthropological concept which I cannot take seriously."

III) Miracles (pp. 63-86)

In Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (c AD8), there are men and women turning into trees, rocks, and birds).

Epicureans protect themselves from fear of exposure to supernatural accountability.

Spinoza denied final causes, claiming they were the same as efficient causes.

IV) Seeing Is Believing (pp. 87-116)

Hume asserts we should be quicker to reject eyewitness miracle testimony than to accept it.

Plato's World of Becoming was the universe, and the World of Being of perfect forms.

Empiricism places induction over deduction.

For Locke, all knowledge must come from sensation and reflection.

Plato believed the soul pre-existed and brings in some memories from the transcendent World of Being.

“Education” derives from the verb *educe*, “to draw out”.

Descartes argued effects must have causes, both prior and greater (the lesser cannot create the greater).

For Chesterton and Lewis, art and morality are not transcendent ideas inscribed in souls from birth. Also, neither our sense of the numinous nor longing could have evolved, but are supernatural.

V) The Good, the True, and the Beautiful (pp. 117-140)

Protagoras the Sophist (485-415BC): “man is the measure of all things”.

Gorgias (483-375BC) claimed nothing exists and all is illusion, also, in Kantian fashion we could never know or communicate with any divine source even if one existed.

Only an absolute of “justice” would enable a man to act justly and thereby expose others as unjust. Socrates suggested this was just doing good to friends and bad to enemies, or, the will of the stronger.

Those who reject realism are nominalists, that man only gives names to things which aren't truly there.

VI) More Moral Than God? (pp. 141-171)

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) holds that as long as one is good and nice, then God will grant us heaven upon death. Believers seek an indulgent grandfather in heaven. Their belief about hell is to anthropomorphise God: 1. no one would send someone to hell since he is merciful; 2. God is more merciful than anyone; 3. Therefore, God will not send anyone to hell.

While God *is* good, we merely possess the *capability* of being good.

VII) The Problem of Pain (pp. 172-191)

Bacon, Descartes, and Spinoza laid the foundation for Enlightenment, which reached its apogee under Locke, Hume and Kant.

The possibility of pain seems to be have engrained in nature from the beginning.

God wills and acts simultaneously from Eternity.

For some reason, God's love does not compel him to eliminate or prevent all suffering.

VIII) The Watchmaker God (pp. 192-219)

In 726, Byzantine emperor Leo III ordered destruction of all icons. Iconoclasy lasted till 843 when Eastern Orthodoxy permanently sanctioned them.

Gnostics were Docetists ("to seem") for they believed Jesus only *seemed* to be a man.

Brahman signifies the eternal impersonal force which pervades all things. Transubstantiation is claimed was familiar to the Aryans of ancient India.

Parmenides argued since God is perfect, complete, and unchanging Being, there can't be any such thing as non-Being (a "void").

IX) The Illusion of Choice (pp. 220-240)

Epicurus, *Letter to Meneoceus*, It would be better to accept the myth about the gods than to be slave to the determination of the physicists.”.

X) Good Without God? (pp. 241-262)

Stoics engage in excessive introspection (“duty-dharma”) which leads to a worship of self.

Conclusion (pp. 263-264)