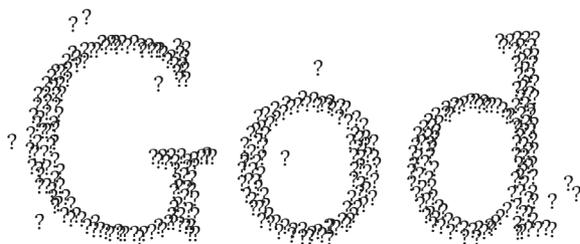


Thank



for
Atheists

TIMOTHY MORGAN



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Foreword

My work in New Testament has often dealt with the skepticism that comes from discussing the gospels and issues tied to the historical Jesus. Skepticism about Jesus and the Bible runs deep for many. But all of this is moot if God does not exist. That also is a popular current take on life and reality. Without God, there is no possibility of divine revelation, no possibility of God sending a Son to die for sin and give life, no possibility that we as humans are special creatures in the creation made in the image of God, accountable to him as our creator and designed to know him in this life and the one to come.

In *Thank God for Atheists*, Tim Morgan speaks as one who has trekked with doubts like an atheist. He has read the texts, listened to the arguments, and has a respect and appreciation for the questions atheists have raised over the centuries, many of them questions bred in honest query and others in a hostility to anything that suggests purpose or design to our world. Whether we consider the atheists of old or the newer, more glitzy version that has worked hard to market themselves much as those of the faith have, Morgan interacts on familiar ground. This book is not an ordinary study and critique of atheism. It is a journey through the history of its arguments, one significant atheist at a time. Starting in classical times and ending up with the modern “Four Horsemen” of atheism, this book works through the labyrinth of skepticism, pointing out the places where queries have made good points, as well as where the objections come up shallow and short.

I am often asked what book I would recommend that faces up to the kind of questions atheism raises. In the past I have just as often found myself suggesting that there is no single book that does this well. That is no longer the case. Here is a work that puts atheism to the test in ways all of us can follow. It is clear about both atheism’s strengths

and weaknesses. It often gives the reader the opportunity to pause and ask if atheism is all it is sometimes said to be. It questions the questioners with great observations. So I commend this book because it engages atheism with honesty, openness, and skill, answering questions many have asked. In its directness, it shows that a world of design is not a delusion, but the product of a purposefulness that gives humanity a rationale that extends existence beyond the void where atheism leaves us. To show that this is where atheism ultimately takes us does people a favor and reflects a humanism that actually gives worth to us all. When we appreciate where atheism ultimately truly takes us, we can see why humanity and life matters when contrasted with the shadow atheism casts over meaning in life.

—**Darrell L. Bock**

Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary

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There is a saying in the Somali language, “Omwana taba womoi,” which translates to “A child belongs not to one parent.” While my name appears on the cover, I am indebted to the following people who helped birth this book.

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I appreciate the members of F.A.C.T.S. (Florida Atheists, Critical Thinkers & Skeptics), who came to numerous meetings of my book club. Their participation helped me understand the atheist mindset as well as demonstrated that not all atheists fit the “angry atheist” stereotype.

Thanks to my loving parents, Mike and Eva Morgan. Mom gave up her career to be home with us kids, and dad worked endless overtime in a hot, smelly, dirty paper mill to provide his children a college education.

Last but certainly not least, I wish to thank my best friend and wife, Megan Morgan. Thank you for your continued love and support even on the days your husband is a bit of a turkeyhead.

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My Journey into Disbelief

*“If only I knew where to find [God]...
if I go to the east, he is not there;
if I go to the west, I do not find him.”¹*

JOB

*“That’s me in the corner. That’s me in the
spotlight, losing my religion.”²*

MICHAEL STIPE, R.E.M.

In a recent Pew Research Center poll, 31 percent—nearly a third of respondents—expressed doubts about the existence of God.³ How about you? When you watched news coverage of a weeping mother pulling the body of her dead infant from the rubble following the 2010 Haiti earthquake or saw an entire village swept away in the 2011 tsunami in Japan, did you wonder, just for a moment, *Where is God in this?*

Perhaps your doubt is more an intellectual hurdle than an emotional objection to suffering. Intellectual obstacles might include reconciling how ice cores drilled from Antarctica appear to indicate the South Pole is at least 800,000 years old, which conflicts with the biblical age of the Earth.⁴ Another issue might be how kangaroos, wombats, and Tasmanian devils made the journey from the final resting place of Noah’s ark all the way to Australia.⁵ They are, after all, not known for their skill at swimming.

Maybe introducing these questions just raised the number of doubters to 31.01 percent. Of the two-thirds of believers who never doubt, some may have strong faith. Others may be well-read and already have answers to these questions. However, a lot of the nondoubters simply surround themselves with like-minded people to shield themselves from challenges to their beliefs. Fair enough, but odds are one day you will be confronted by a child, a friend, or maybe even a spouse with doubts that you cannot ignore by simply walking away. Just like it is better to keep the fire going in your marriage than it is to attempt to relight an extinguished flame, the best time to tackle doubt is in the calm, not during the storm.

This is not a book of easy answers. This is a book for people who like to think. I will present arguments both for and against belief in God. Both theists and atheists will find some parts disturbing and other parts comforting. This is not a book for people whose response to conflicting views is to bury their heads in the sand. It is not a book for intellectual cowards.

Fair warning: You are going to hear an honest presentation of the atheist worldview. However, the whole point of my story is how and why I found the atheist view so unconvincing that it drove me back to faith, something which cannot be explained unless you know what that view is.

Thus, if you like books that challenge your thinking and not just “yes” books designed to make you feel better about believing something you already wanted to believe in the first place, this is the book for you. Welcome, brave and inquisitive reader, hungry for knowledge.

One caveat for the atheist reader: This is your book too! I have walked the proverbial mile in your shoes. I was a card-carrying agnostic atheist when I started researching this book. You will not find watered-down caricatures of the atheist position here. At the end of this chapter, I document the measures I have taken to present both positions fairly.

What follows is a series of four mini-debates with the greatest minds of atheism, from atheist forerunners like Friedrich Nietzsche to the New Atheists. In addition to copious reading, I watched innumerable debates while researching this book (which began as a personal search for the

meaning of life). One of my favorite debates was a discussion between Richard Dawkins and John Lennox from Oxford University's Museum of Natural History,⁶ not only because of the content but because it was a great example of how even those who deeply disagree can still maintain respect and civility. The remarkable part was that when people from the audience were interviewed afterward, the reaction was nearly evenly split over whether Dawkins or Lennox had made the most persuasive argument. These people heard the same set of facts, yet some found them persuasive while others thought them to be spurious.

Aristotle best explained this phenomenon. He said people evaluate truth on the basis of three factors: an intellectual factor that he called *logos*, an emotional factor called *pathos*, and a social factor, *ethos*. In sharp contrast, almost 300 years later in his speech "Pro Milone," Cicero gave us *Res ipsa loquitur*, or, in its modern form, "The facts speak for themselves." Aristotle had it right. Consider how often people hear the same facts yet arrive at substantially different conclusions regarding their meaning. If the facts truly speak for themselves, why do the resulting interpretations vary so greatly? How is it that of two college students taking the same philosophy class, one punts his lifelong faith while the other embraces belief in God for the first time in his life? Something beyond facts alone must be involved.

Clearly Aristotle was on to something in observing there are considerations beyond the facts that influence how we attempt to fit those facts into our worldviews. If you expect a completed puzzle to look like Leonardo da Vinci's painting *The Last Supper*, you will arrange the puzzle pieces differently than someone who expects the completed puzzle to resemble the gray rectangle that appears on the reverse side. It is fascinating how our presuppositions guide how we fit the pieces together. Both the person who envisions a colorful, meaningful end result and the person who thinks the final image should be devoid of color and meaning can make all the pieces fit.

When Facts Keep Us from Finding Truth

Anyone who reads this book just for its facts is unlikely to find anything persuasive here. Unless we are willing to consider the emotional

and social factors behind our beliefs, we are merely looking for ways to force facts to fit our preconceived models. I will highlight several examples of such forced fact manipulation throughout the book. Facts can be twisted. Facts can be selectively ignored. No one builds a worldview solely on facts.

In fact (pun intended), a series of studies in 2005 and 2006 by researchers at the University of Michigan found that when misinformed people were exposed to corrected facts in news stories, they rarely changed their minds. To the contrary, they often became even more strongly convinced of their erroneous beliefs. Facts, the researchers found, were not curing misinformation. Instead, like an underpowered antibiotic, facts can actually make the bacteria of misinformation even stronger.⁷

Brendan Nyhan, the lead researcher on the Michigan study, said, “The general idea is that it’s absolutely threatening to admit you’re wrong.”⁸ He explained how the phenomenon of being confronted by facts leads to a known psychological reaction called “backfire,” whereby someone would rather double down on wrong beliefs than acknowledge making a bad bet.

Thus, my challenge to you is to not let this book “backfire” on you. I implore you, if you have the courage, to not read the four debates with the mindset of “your position” and the “response to your position.” Try, if at all possible, to read both sides as if you had no opinion on the matter. Granted, this is incredibly difficult to do. Perhaps it may help to visualize the proverbial man shipwrecked on a desert island since childhood who is hearing these arguments for the first time. Try imagining the reaction of someone who has never heard any arguments on this subject. If you can achieve a mindset of neutrality, this book may be eye-opening. Otherwise, the huge number of facts may just further entrench your current beliefs, regardless of whether they are right or wrong.

A Preacher’s Deconversion

Be wary of anyone who presents “just the facts” on theism or atheism. It is my belief that any fair and honest discussion on such matters should include an open disclosure of the speaker’s background. This chapter is mine.

My story is that of a former Southern Baptist preacher who lost his faith, became agnostic, and embarked on a path to fully embrace atheism. I attempted to rid myself of the baggage of my childhood religious indoctrination that had influenced my career, my relationships, and even my personality, only to leave me disappointed with what became of my life as a result.

Immediately some irreligious readers are going to doubt the veracity of my story. After all, skeptical writing is replete with claims that belief in God is merely wishful thinking. The general sentiment is that someone simply needs enough courage to face the stark reality that we are here alone in order to embrace the end of faith. Anyone sincerely willing to give up the comfort inherent in the premise “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life”⁹ will find ample scientific evidence to explain our origin and existence without the need for God, right?

Radical German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach posited that idea two centuries ago. He argued that God was merely an invention dreamed up by human beings to provide metaphysical consolation.¹⁰ Sigmund Freud later popularized that position.¹¹ Is it possible for someone to sincerely explore the origin and nature of the cosmos without concluding that we live in a closed mechanical system wherein science has explained away the old man in the sky playing dice with the universe?

Skeptics may question the sincerity of someone who claims to have studied atheism with an open mind, even a positive disposition toward it, yet found it intellectually unfulfilling. That was certainly the case for me. When I turned to the great skeptics like Nietzsche, Russell, Freud, Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett, Harris, Shermer, and Boghossian for answers, I found none that were cogent. Before you write off my quest as insincere, please extend me the courtesy of hearing why I sought an alternative model to faith and judge for yourself.

How I Came to Faith in the First Place

I once heard a speaker say even as a small child he had a drug problem. After a dramatic pause for effect, he continued, “Every Sunday morning my momma drug me to Sunday school, every Sunday

evening she drug me to Sunday night services, every Wednesday she drug me to mid-week service.” That was my upbringing; every time the church doors were open we were drug there. If you believe Richard Dawkins, I was brainwashed and abused. He claims early religious indoctrination leads to “the presumptuousness whereby religious people *know*, without evidence, that the faith of their birth is the one true faith, all others being aberrations or downright false.”¹²

Since I have met people like that, I cannot fault Dawkins for making that observation. However, it is not universally true and certainly was not for me. Growing up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the variety of people and views I was exposed to were just fine shades of redneck culture. Mind you, they were great people who would give you the shirts off their backs, but I felt like I was trapped in an endless episode of *Duck Dynasty*. It was not until college that I was exposed to international students, foreign professors, and a marketplace overflowing with new worldviews.

As I contemplated my own views in the context of the beliefs of Muslims, Hindus, atheists, and others I interacted with in the dorms and around campus, I could not escape the offensive quality of my belief that these people were destined for hell. It was easy to believe the exclusivity of Christianity in church youth group where I was surrounded by people of similar persuasion while nonbelievers were nameless, faceless foreigners and outsiders. It was tougher to stomach this idea when the Muslim was the nice guy sitting next to me in sociology class who had a wife and kid and just wanted to get an education and a small slice of the American dream. It was too convenient, suspiciously so, that I just so happened to be born into the “right” faith while he was constrained to hell, primarily because of where he was born and raised. Quite to the opposite of Dawkins’ claim, my upbringing caused me to seriously doubt my serendipitous luck of emerging from the right womb.

I was envious of those who converted from agnosticism to faith in college because they had a certainty I lacked in knowing they had not simply adopted the faith of their parents. It was at that time that I started looking for reasons that validated my beliefs. I wanted to know

if my beliefs were worth believing. Interestingly enough, I found that almost every author who wrote on the subject had converted from atheism to theism in adulthood. There were scientists like Francis Collins and Alister McGrath, journalist Lee Strobel, and authors C.S. Lewis and Josh McDowell. Although I continued to wrestle with whether I was being presumptuous, I did feel some validation in that even hardened atheists like Antony Flew experienced late-life conversions.

I explored the evidence Dawkins accuses religious people of accepting *a priori*, like the historicity of the Gospel writers' accounts, the validity of the biblical canon, and extrabiblical corroboration of Jesus' life and teaching, and grappled with historical considerations such as the theory that Constantine invented Christianity to unite the Roman empire around a common religion.¹³ I found the evidence for Christianity quite compelling. It is worth noting, however, that at this stage in my life I was reading Christian writers whom I expected to validate my views. I was not yet reading any skeptical writers, a fact that I will return to shortly.

It was during college that I sensed God calling me to be a pastor. After graduating valedictorian of my class with a Bachelor of Science from Louisiana Tech, I completed a Master's program at Dallas Theological Seminary, the largest nondenominational seminary in the world. To contextualize my theology, Dallas Seminary would have been a Presbyterian seminary at its founding but remained independent over the lone issue of dispensationalism.

My First Major Disappointment with God

After graduating from seminary I was invited to be an associate pastor at a church in Florida. I came into the position with all the eager expectation of someone hoping to change the world, or at the very least one hot, sunny little corner of it. However, I soon found all the wonderful, nationally proven programs I wished to implement were met only with resistance if not open opposition. The status quo was so deeply entrenched in that traditional community church that I was vilified for challenging it.

On several occasions I was reprimanded by members of the deacon

board for usurping authority from the senior pastor. He was a nice fellow with whom I enjoyed working and with whom I had no personal qualms, but I did have trouble adopting his vision, not because I disagreed with it, but simply because it seemed nonexistent. He was quite content with the church just like it was. Once when I pressed him on his future vision for the church, he responded, “The only person who likes change is a wet baby.” While he was content to just punch the clock and collect a check, I was working too hard for too little pay to be satisfied by the status quo. Therefore I pushed for some new programs, like a Saturday night service with contemporary music, more community outreach, and the possibility of a satellite campus. However, I soon learned the meaning of the Japanese proverb “The nail that stands the tallest receives the blow” when I was fired for insubordination.

I was not just terminated, but run out of town in the most unbecoming manner, being paid two months of hush money if I voluntarily resigned and saved the deacons any embarrassment over an otherwise controversial termination. There had been a small minority in favor of the changes I advocated. If the leader were to fall on his own sword, well, who could blame the deacons for that? Finding myself in the tough position of choosing between having food in the fridge or taking the moral high road, I took the buyout and bit my tongue. The experience was a decided disappointment and window into the dark side of church politics.

Shortly thereafter, new information shed light on why the senior pastor always kept to himself and avoided stepping on toes. A few months after my departure, it came to light that he, a married man, had engaged in a lengthy affair with a married parishioner. It all immediately made sense; the man was so racked with guilt that he did not feel like a leader and, even if he had the motivation to lead, he could not afford to step on anyone’s toes and invite scrutiny of his personal life.

In a nutshell, my first foray into Christian church work was to go where I thought God had directed me, only to be subjected to two years of wall-beating skullduggery due to a pastor’s extramarital affair that indirectly cost me my job. That was strike one for God.

Further Frustration with God

I accepted a position as a Baptist church planter for my second pastoral job. I left my friends in Florida to start a new church in California. The denomination promised me a salary for two years in order to launch a new church and grow it to financial self-sufficiency. Still licking my wounds from my first foray into Christian vocational work, I prayed long and earnestly, “God, guide me to the right place. Please deliver me from another mess.”

California, however, would prove to be another debacle. After packing everything I owned and moving coast-to-coast, I was immediately greeted by disappointment when I learned that the pastor who was supposedly coordinating this church plant had overpromised the available support structure. Though he had not secured a firm commitment from the denomination, he nonetheless assumed that they would commit funds. He did not warn me the plan was based on presumptions, not promises. Once I arrived, the denomination was not sympathetic to the project, the funding was not given, and I found myself alone in a strange new city. I had a job in title only with only a fraction of the promised income, which was not enough to live on.

The pastor felt bad about the situation and gave me free room and board in his guest room, but it did not seem like the rest of his family agreed, so I quickly found my living conditions quite awkward. Living in someone else’s full house, I had nowhere to store my personal belongings and no money to pay for storage, so a local youth pastor, Paul, allowed me to store my things for free in his recently condemned rental house.

Eventually the denomination allocated some funds to the project, and I was able to rent a small studio apartment. When I returned to Paul’s rental house to retrieve my things, I found the door kicked in and my valuables pilfered by unscrupulous thieves.

Despite the rocky start, I poured my heart and soul into the church plant endeavor for the next two years. Things never got much easier, however. If there was a central theme to that period of my life, it was Matthew 5:45: “[God] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good,

and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” I was sacrificing everything for God, but not finding any more sunshine for it. If anything, it seemed like storm clouds constantly darkened my life while things were sunnier in the lives of nonbelievers around me.

At the time, I had the best Chevy Camaro money could buy, a grad school graduation gift from my family that was my pride and joy. It was my lone nice possession. It had an aftermarket body kit and custom grill that made it truly one of a kind, a real head-turner. I sold it to buy a used SUV that we desperately needed so we could move gear for our weekly church service that met in a rented space. I survived on ramen noodles to free up more funds for marketing and promoting the new church. Each decision was bathed in prayer. Though I strongly felt it was God’s will and would not fail, it all came to naught.

The SUV was broken into and the church’s sound system, keyboard, laptop, video camera, and projector were stolen. The promo pieces we mailed did not bring in any new people, although I did receive some hate mail explaining that churches are bad for the community because they remove valuable property from the tax base and “isolate people in holy huddles that do nothing for their community.” The angry atheist’s letter complained that churches remove people from “legitimate service organizations” like the Rotary Club or Kiwanis that actually better the community. What kind of person takes the time to write hate mail to churches?

As if being robbed twice in the first year, the financial struggles, and the church’s slow start were not frustrating enough, my continued singleness haunted me personally and professionally. The church plant struggled because a single pastor lacked legitimacy in the eyes of our target demographic. Statistics show unchurched people join churches primarily after they get married and start families. What did a single pastor who knew nothing of their lifestyles have to offer? Moreover, I felt lonely in the irreligious county I had moved to, where it was rare to meet women who shared my religious faith.

I eventually did meet one gal who was passionate about God. She also wanted to be in full-time Christian work. Our goals were so much aligned that it seemed like we would make a great team. I prayed

ferently, “God, I can handle being broke and the church faltering, if I just had someone like Christelle in my life so I don’t have to do this all alone.” It was just another unanswered prayer, though. Strike two for God.

I was not upset with God that Christelle did not take a romantic interest in me. It would be supremely selfish to pray for that. No, the frustrating thing was that she did not take an interest in any Christian guy. She told me she was quite content with “just her and Jesus.” In fact, when I looked her up more than a decade later, she was still plucking along single in her late thirties. While I knew Jesus loved her, I also knew he had no plans to marry her. If he was not going to take her to the altar, I thought it rude that he would stand in everyone else’s way.

All this time I was burning the candle at both ends, working 80-plus-hour weeks trying to facilitate a church coming together within our allotted time frame. However, being young and single, the church was attracting people of similar circumstance. Weekend service attendance peaked at 30 or so, but many were students, unemployed, or underemployed. At the end of two years of toil, the church was not financially self-sufficient. When the denomination pulled the plug financially, everything I had worked so hard for began to unravel.

I tried to tough it out and stay on without pay. I looked for secular work to pay the bills so I could keep working at the church as an unpaid, volunteer pastor. However, Agilent, the largest employer in our relatively small city, had just made massive layoffs. Even when I tried to get hired as a Starbucks barista I found myself competing against engineers with master’s degrees.

I was running out of money and the church plant was in an agonizing and inevitable downward spiral. With profound disappointment and sadness, I took the only job I could find, one all the way across the country, using my skills as a flight instructor. I gave up on California. Moreover, as this was strike three, I gave up on God.

Why I Wanted God to Go Away

Trying my best to serve God had left me broke, alone, and disenchanted. If this was what loving and serving God were like, then

I wanted nothing to do with Him. I gave away my massive library of theological books and left for Massachusetts intending to hit the reset button on my life for a fresh, godless start. I had given God nearly a decade of fervent, sincere service and had nothing to show for it. It only seemed reasonable to try life without him for a change. I felt I could not do any worse.

Unfortunately, the idea continued to haunt me that God was still “out there” and I was merely ignoring him. I had not yet stopped believing, only caring. I had experienced enough years of frustration trying to please God. I was through fretting over that. However, it bothered me that He might be silently watching in disappointment, taking notes like some hall monitor in the sky. The possibility remained that I may still have to answer to him one day. I did not merely want to live with indifference to God; I wanted God to go away. I did not just want God to leave me alone; I wanted God to disappear entirely. I wished to live my own life without the interference of my childhood religious indoctrination. As C.S. Lewis wrote in *Surprised by Joy*,

No word in my vocabulary expressed deeper hatred than the word INTERFERENCE. But Christianity placed at the center what then seemed to me a transcendental Interferer. If its picture were true then no sort of ‘treaty with reality’ could ever be possible. There was no region even in the innermost depth of one’s soul (nay, there least of all) which one could surround with a barbed wire fence and guard with a notice “No Admittance.” And that was what I wanted; some area, however small, of which I could say to all other beings, “This is my business and mine only.”¹⁴

That decade of disappointment opened my mind to atheism. It offered an escape, an out, from a belief system that I had found to be nothing but problematic. I picked up atheist authors like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Bertrand Russell, and Friedrich Nietzsche for the first time. I trust I have adequately laid out my sincere, eager expectation and willingness to believe them. I “read not to contradict and confute...but to weigh and consider,” as Francis

Bacon said in *The Essays*. These books on atheism to me were Bacon's "few [books] to read wholly, and with diligence and attention." Coming full circle to my earlier comment, in college I read books by theists in order to embrace theism. Now I was reading books by atheists in order to embrace atheism. My heart was over God. My head sought a good intellectual reason to dismiss Him permanently.

Why Atheism Proved Intellectually Unfulfilling

I was astoundingly disappointed by what I read. The arguments were so poor that the greatest authors of atheism did more than any Christian apologist to push me toward belief in God. Christian writers had made some good arguments, but nothing that equated to incontrovertible proof. If an indisputable argument for God's existence were so hard to erect, I expected the other side would have an unassailable counterargument that addressed the Christian apologist and, even more importantly, provided a positive case against belief in God.

I kept reading more and more books on atheism, each time thinking, "Surely this cannot be the best argument for it." I kept hoping the next book would present a better case than the prior only to find each new book just as disappointing as the last. I expected to hear a strong argument for why there is no God. Instead, atheists like Russell candidly admitted, "I do not pretend to be able to prove that there is no God."¹⁵ I was deeply disappointed.

When atheists engaged apologists with rebuttals, they often merely attacked caricatures of their positions. When they advanced a positive case, such as an argument for philosophical materialism, their rationales suffered from serious logical flaws.

I implore the skeptical reader not to brand my experience balderdash. I acknowledge I have made a bold and brash statement, but I believe it is one I have backed up in this book. I challenge both skeptic and Christian alike to read through to the end and evaluate whether my findings are unfair or insincere. I am not arguing *for* anything, but simply relaying my experience of reading this literature with an open mind and the reasons I found it intellectually unfulfilling.

In each chapter I will explore one book on atheism. I felt the four

books included here best represent atheistic thought because they are either well-known *New York Times* bestsellers, have had a significant influence in the discourse of nonbelief, show the development in atheists' views over time, or are some combination of all of those. I have purposely included a wide spectrum of atheist authors ranging from Enlightenment era, like Nietzsche, to the current modern leaders of the New Atheists, like Richard Dawkins. I did so in order to represent the whole position. I do not want to be accused of targeting weak links like early, undeveloped writings or later writings of more confrontational tone. It is my goal to summarize the arguments each author advances with the same impartiality of CliffNotes summarizing *Hamlet*. Believers who read this book will gain a good grasp on the issues skeptical authors are raising and will hopefully gain insight, even empathy, into why nonbelievers see things differently.

Have I fairly summarized the atheist position? Richard Dawkins thinks so. Upon reading my summary of his book, he wrote that it "strikes me as an admirably fair and thorough summary of my book."¹⁶ I made the same offer to Sam Harris to review the summary of his book, but he did not respond. It is worth noting, however, that Dawkins asked me to modify only one point in the entire summary, and I attempted to be equally fair to Harris' work.

Being fair to Nietzsche and Russell obviously presented a larger challenge since they are deceased. I posted the summary of their books in the atheist forum on Reddit.com to solicit feedback from the more than two million atheist members of the forum. I also invited members of the F.A.C.T.S. (Florida Atheists, Critical Thinkers & Skeptics) to attend my book club for face-to-face dialogue. I am indebted to the members of F.A.C.T.S. who attended and the individuals who commented in the Reddit forum for their suggestions, which led to numerous revisions to the summaries of the atheists' positions in order to fairly represent their arguments. I wanted to present the best each author offers, not some watered-down caricature of their positions.

While some skeptics may not agree with some or any of my critiques, it is my goal to make a fair summary of each author's position before critiquing it so that no one may accuse me of setting up a straw

man. Only after I have fairly summarized each book's position will I share my personal observations about the issues I found with the arguments that, for me, presented insurmountable obstacles to adopting the view. Beginning with chapter 3, I present a chapter summarizing an atheist's seminal work, such as Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, followed by a response chapter. Cross-references are given for each significant point because you may occasionally desire an immediate response to a particular issue. However, I encourage you to consider the cumulative weight of the full argument whenever possible in order to perceive how the individual points are interconnected.

In all this, I am simply sharing my own journey. It is not my goal to hard-sell either worldview. You are free to draw your own conclusions based on the evidence.

As I began my journey into disbelief, I read these works in the order that they were brought to my attention. I picked up books because atheist friends recommended them or, in the case of Hitchens, because his articulate debating skills impressed me. Sometimes I read whichever book Amazon delivered first. However, the speed of the US postal service hardly makes for a logical book outline, so I have arranged the material here chronologically ranging from ancient atheism through the most recent books of the New Atheists. The chronological order also highlights how atheism first distanced itself from Nietzsche before digging into the trenches it has guarded since the early 1900s.

While this order allows a logical progression, I acknowledge I was further into my journey of disbelief while reading certain books. Therefore, I have tried to disclaim each chapter with a short introduction describing my disposition toward disbelief at that stage of my journey.

My goal is both modest and monumental. For the theist unfamiliar with atheist writing, I have summarized more than 100 years of atheists' arguments. I hope believers finish this book with a better understanding and appreciation of the mindset of the unconvinced. For the unbeliever, I have sworn myself to be fair to the best of my ability in representing the views that I formerly favored. Ideally, an unbeliever who has not read any books on atheism will finish this one with an accurate overview of the arguments atheists are presenting and the

particular nuances each individual author offers that would aid the reader in determining which author he may wish to further explore.

I hope to go beyond just presenting a good overview of the subject to actually challenging people's thinking, never by condemning or criticizing, but by pointing out the full implications of some arguments and the fallaciousness of others through logical, dispassionate dialogue that appeals to the mind, not the emotions. I hope to stretch and even challenge readers' thinking, but never to attack, slander, or satirize.