



# The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism

By Edward Feser

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Professor Edward Feser argues here that Richard Dawkins has it all wrong. God is not a hypothesis, to be replaced if a more satisfactory theory comes up. Quite the contrary, Feser suggests, the existence of God can be proved by rationally compelling arguments. He thinks that not only is Dawkins wrong about this but so are his fellow atheists Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris, all three of whom are frequently subject to humorous and telling remarks.

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### Editorial Review

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\*Starred Review\* New Atheists Richards Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris get their comeuppance from philosopher Feser in the spirit with which they abuse believers. "Their books stand out for their manifest ignorance" of the Western religious tradition, he says, "and for the breathtaking shallowness of their philosophical analysis of religious matters." Far better than such no-quarters rhetoric, however, are the review of pre-Aristotelian philosophy and the summary of Aristotelian metaphysics and Thomas Aquinas' refinements of Aristotle that make up the heart, soul, and bulk of the book. Feser chooses to argue from Aristotle because he was not arguing from any religious perspective and because Aristotle's logic, his rationality, hasn't been improved upon or refuted by modern philosophy. Aristotle's proof that there is a prime mover or pure being—God—remains solid. Ignoramuses like the four horsemen of the apostasy, whose factual errors, half-truths, and mischaracterization Feser highlights with contemptuous glee, "refute" Aristotle only by changing the playing field from metaphysics to science, from philosophical realism to materialism. With energy and humor as well as transparent exposition, Feser reestablishes the unassailable superiority of classical philosophy. --Ray Olson

### Review

"A thoughtful and theologically sophisticated sally into the ranks of the New Atheism. Feser has written a lively and well informed polemic against the latest crop of Village Atheists - Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, & Co. - who have provided the public with so much entertainment and so little enlightenment these past few years. This is a serious and passionately engaged challenge to the latest effort to impose a dehumanizing orthodoxy by religious illiterates." -- *Roger Kimball, co-editor and publisher, The New Criterion*

"Edward Feser's book is a timely wake-up call to the many people who have been seduced by the amateurish attempts at philosophy of religion found in the popular bestsellers of the 'Faithless Foursome,' Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, and Harris.

"Feser shows that the so-called 'New Atheism' is just the old atheism, only more irrational. But at the same time as carrying out his incisive critique of all that is bad in contemporary popular atheism, he presents an admirable 101 course in philosophy for people who care. About what? About the classical metaphysical tradition going from the best of the ancient Greeks, through the medieval philosophers, and down to the neo-Aristotelianism and neo-Thomism of today.

"Anyone who comes away from *The Last Superstition* thinking that potboiler atheism has anything to recommend it, or that belief in God is irrational, will not be convinced by anything. For the rest of us, the book is, to use an apposite term, a godsend. And the caustic humour peppering the book adds just the sort of spice this fraught subject needs. If the Faithless Foursome were at all interested in a serious rebuttal, they now have it." -- *David Oderberg, Professor of Philosophy, University of Reading, UK*

"There have been largely two types of critics of the 'New Atheism.' One type grants the empiricism of the atheists and then tries to show that belief in God is consistent with it. This approach gives away the store by removing God from the realm of the knowable. The second also grants the atheists' empiricism, but argues that it leads to the detection of design in the universe and thus the existence of God. This approach gives away the store as well, by limiting knowledge to the empirically detectable. Professor Feser offers us a third

approach, one that is far more effective in defeating the New Atheism. He provides persuasive arguments that show that God is knowable and that what is knowable is larger than the set of that which is empirically detectable. This is a tour de force that should be in the library of every thinking citizen, believer or unbeliever." -- Francis J. Beckwith, *Professor of Philosophy and Church-State Studies, Baylor University*

"New Atheists Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris get their comeuppance from philosopher Feser in the spirit with which they abuse believers. 'Their books stand out for their manifest ignorance' of the Western religious tradition, he says, 'and for the breathtaking shallowness of their philosophical analysis of religious matters.' Far better than such no-quarters rhetoric, however, are the review of pre-Aristotelian philosophy and the summary of Aristotelian metaphysics and Thomas Aquinas' refinements of Aristotle that make up the heart, soul, and bulk of the book. Feser chooses to argue from Aristotle because he was not arguing from any religious perspective and because Aristotle's logic, his rationality, hasn't been improved upon or refuted by modern philosophy. Aristotle's proof that there is a prime mover or pure being – God – remains solid. Ignoramuses like the four horsemen of the apostasy, whose factual errors, half-truths, and mischaracterization Feser highlights with contemptuous glee, 'refute' Aristotle only by changing the playing field from metaphysics to science, from philosophical realism to materialism. With energy and humor as well as transparent exposition, Feser reestablishes the unassailable superiority of classical philosophy." --Ray Olson, *ALA Booklist*, starred review, October 1, 2008

Richard Dawkins, the Oxford biologist and prominent atheist, argues in *The God Delusion* that belief in God is outdated. Before 1859, it was reasonable to think that life on earth had been designed.... But, Dawkins maintains, Charles Darwin changed all that. He showed that adaptations could be explained by natural selection. No appeal to an intelligent designer is required. Darwin thus made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.

Professor Edward Feser argues in his brilliant new book *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism* that Dawkins has it all wrong. God is not a hypothesis, to be replaced if a more satisfactory theory comes up. Quite the contrary, Feser suggests, the existence of God can be proved by rationally compelling arguments. He thinks that not only is Dawkins wrong about this but so are his fellow atheists Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris, all three of whom are frequently subject to humorous and telling remarks.

Feser's is a bold claim indeed, one very much out of philosophical fashion. In mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, the dominant position is that Hume and Kant long ago showed that the theistic proofs do not work. To overturn this verdict is a formidable task, and to accomplish it Feser needs to present a great deal of background material. The principal reason, he holds, that modern philosophers reject the theistic proofs is that, since the Enlightenment, they have accepted a truncated notion of causation. Today, philosophers think of a cause as one event, preceding another in time that brings it about. As an example, if I light a match, these philosophers would take this to mean that the event of striking the match is followed by the event of the fire's appearance.

This departs from Aristotle's delineation of four causes, efficient, final, formal, and material. Aristotle's efficient cause corresponds most closely to the modern view, but even here the resemblance is not very strong. Aristotle thought efficient causation involved a substance rather than an event: I, not the event of striking the match, cause the fire.

To grasp Aristotle's doctrine of causation, developed and extended by Thomas Aquinas and other scholastics, Feser needs to go back to Plato to explain the famous problem of universals. He argues against the view that universals are merely words or concepts in our minds. Instead, he favors the moderate realism of Aristotle and Aquinas. All this may sound abstract, but it is essential to understanding the way in which Feser thinks that God's existence can be proved. Readers who are willing to cope with this rather difficult

material will gain something else, besides being in a position to understand the theistic proofs. They will learn a great deal about the history of philosophy. I have never seen the topics that Feser discusses presented so clearly. It is an effort well worth the effort. --David Gordon, Ludwig von Mises Institute, for The American Conservative Union Foundation, Issue 120, November 19, 2008

#### Review

*"The Last Superstition* should be assigned reading, and not only for those who think philosophical know-nothings like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens hot stuff. 'Secularism,' says author Edward Feser, 'is, necessarily and inherently, a deeply irrational and immoral view of the world, and the more thoroughly it is assimilated by its adherents, the more thoroughly do they cut themselves off from the very possibility of rational and moral understanding.' Feser gives the 'New Atheists' a dose of their own polemical medicine, but with a difference: Unlike them, he knows what he is doing. This rollicking counter-attack is learned, carefully reasoned, and philosophically astute."

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writing, they also doing some research before they write with their book. One of them is this The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism.

**Brandy Brobst:**

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