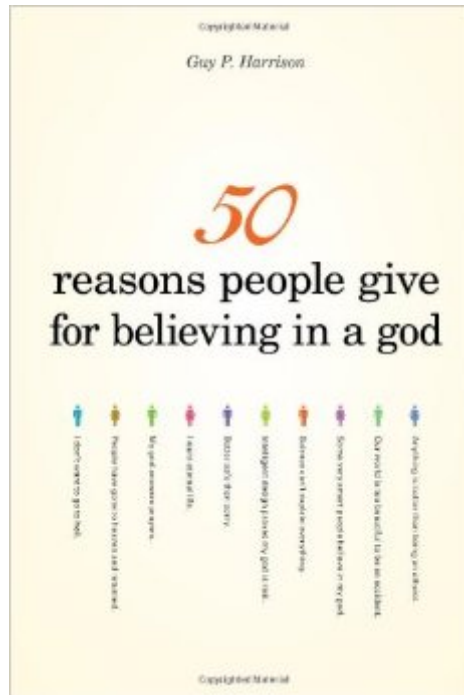


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50 Reasons People Give For Believing In A God



Synopsis

Many books that challenge religious belief from a skeptical point of view take a combative tone that is almost guaranteed to alienate believers or they present complex philosophical or scientific arguments that fail to reach the average reader. This is undoubtedly an ineffective way of encouraging people to develop critical thinking about religion. This unique approach to skepticism presents fifty commonly heard reasons people often give for believing in a God and then raises legitimate questions regarding these reasons, showing in each case that there is much room for doubt. Whether you're a believer, a complete skeptic, or somewhere in between, you'll find this review of traditional and more recent arguments for the existence of God refreshing, approachable, and enlightening. From religion as the foundation of morality to the authority of sacred books, the compelling religious testimony of influential people, near-death experiences, arguments from Intelligent Design, and much more, Harrison respectfully describes each rationale for belief and then politely shows the deficiencies that any good skeptic would point out. As a journalist who has traveled widely and interviewed many highly accomplished people, quite a number of whom are believers, the author appreciates the variety of belief and the ways in which people seek to make religion compatible with scientific thought. Nonetheless, he shows that, despite the prevalence of belief in God or religious belief in intelligent people, in the end there are no unassailable reasons for believing in a God. For skeptics looking for appealing ways to approach their believing friends or believers who are not afraid to consider a skeptical challenge, this book makes for very stimulating reading.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In 2007 I left evangelical Christianity after twenty-four years of deep involvement. Early that year I'd read a number of the "new atheist" books on the market with the intent of challenging and strengthening my walk with God. Instead, I ended up realizing I was on the wrong track, that what I'd heard and saw in church all those years didn't gel with my experiences away from the pulpit. Many of the reasons why I parted from my faith are in this excellent and necessary book. "50 Reasons People Give for Believing in a God" is exactly that. Each chapter's title is a common statement made by a religious person to justify his or her belief, such as "I want eternal life," "some very smart people believe in God," and "atheism is a negative and empty philosophy." The author responds to these and forty-seven other faith-based pronouncements in a reasonable, logical, and easy-to-read manner. The chapters are fairly short, so you won't be overwhelmed by minutiae, and they end with a bibliography and recommended reading list that enables further topical exploration. Many folks are turned off by the polemic tone displayed by atheist authors such as Dawkins, Hitchens, and Harris. I think that their books should be read by everyone, but they are probably too harsh for most people of faith to start with. Guy Harrison rebuts religion and makes his case for atheism in a much more gentle and respectful fashion. Yes, one can tell that Mr. Harrison prefers rationality over faith, and sometimes his frustration with the latter shows. But on the whole his attitude is much easier to swallow than the aforementioned trio, so believers or people on the fence should feel more comfortable exploring atheist thought with this book.

Harrison is an anthropologist. He studies Man's cultures, including the thousands of religions that have been invented. Yes, he is of the mind that Man made it all up without even knowing it, but he does not discriminate, insult, or otherwise abuse believers. He likes them and frequently attends religious services with them. Harrison has made it a habit to ask believers why they believe in their god or gods. In this book he has compiled essays built around the fifty most common answers to that question. His essays are not formally philosophical and are not about splitting theological hairs. Instead, each essay is conversational common sense with statistics about religion thrown in. He does not capitalize god or gods, since he rarely talks about any specific deity, among the thousands that have existed. Several themes recur: He emphasizes that every believer is an atheist about every god other than their own preferred god. Which god a person believes in is almost always an accident of birth. Atheists don't choose to be atheists - they just end up not believing. They are the fourth most plentiful group, after Christians, Muslims, and Hindus - and that only counts the ones out of the closet. The fifth most plentiful group is animism. Various religions make irreconcilable claims

that can't all be right, despite the zeal of their believers. This most likely suggests that none of them are true and that humans are good at inventing gods. The countries highest in atheism are the most peaceful and the countries highest in religiosity are the most violent. The same picture shows up in blue versus red states in the US. Although religions are capable of good things, on balance, they are bad for society.

I have to confess that when I finished reading this book, I felt this inner freedom and joy. I actually started crying and I felt like this is what I've been looking for all my life. It was a weird feeling that is hard to explain and put in words. It was like seeing a born again Christian when they claim they feel the "holy ghost"...which I honestly tried, but never experienced in my life. I think this book has a passive tone and it should be read by all, especially those that have a passionate thirst for wonder, reason, and what I feel is common sense. I heard about this book one morning while listening to NPR, and I am so glad I decided to buy it. I usually carry the book in my car...it's like a bible to me. I also bought Dan Barker's "Godless"...which was also an awesome book. Being labeled as an atheist in our American society isn't always peachy...I know I get judged alot. I tell people that I am a realist before an atheist. My wife told me that she feels sorry for me...probably because she thinks I'm not going to be there in heaven with her. I sure hope that future generations will part from this primitive way of thinking...but we can only hope. I think that our worst enemies is ourselves, our minds, and our ignorance. Are we truly the most intelligent animals on earth? Sometimes we don't act that way. I wonder what the rest of the animal kingdom thinks of us humans...especially when they see us talking to imaginary gods, and killing each other to please these gods. If all living things were created by some intelligent designer, why are humans the ONLY species that are required to believe, praise, worship, obey, and be judged by this creator? I use to feel that being human was more of a curse than a gift.

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