

Filling in the God of the Gaps

A Review

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Atheist Universe, by David Mills, with a foreword by Dorion Sagan (Ulysses Press: Berkeley, CA, 272 pp., 2006, ISBN: 1-56975-567-1, Paper, \$16.95.)

Most theists continue to promote the idea that the universe and life within it would be pretty much impossible were there no God to create it all. They rely upon creationism, Intelligent Design, the anthropic principle, the cosmological argument, and other scientific-sounding ideas to support this notion.

However, science writer David Mills' book *Atheist Universe*, helps to demolish the strongest arguments that theists advance to support the extraordinary claim that God exists. For example, Dorion Sagan, son of Carl Sagan, writes in the foreword that: "...the discoveries by astrophysicists of hydrogen, carbon and other chemical elements in and around the stars shows that the ingredients of life exist throughout the universe..." (p. 9) In other words, because the stuff of which life is made is so plentiful throughout the universe, the existence of life does not seem nearly as improbable as it once did.

This book, however, is not strictly about showing how life and the universe could come to be without a creator. The book is also about other subjects, such as the notion that only theists (in some cases, only fundamentalist Christians) can be good people. Mills shows just how wrong and insulting this bigoted idea is. He writes that:

Martin Luther King, Jr. taught us to judge individuals, not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. Many Christian Fundamentalists, however, judge individuals, not by the content of their character, but by the color of their religious beliefs. (p. 18)

It would seem that in the 21st century, where people are so thoroughly interconnected and likely to know so many people from varied backgrounds, they would at some time run into people from other religions (or none at all) that are

their moral superiors. Yet they would use their faith as the trump card in which they imagine to have some moral advantage over those outside their religion. However, all that really matters in this world is that people treat each other well. Their creeds or lack thereof ultimately mean nothing to the survival of the human race. Living well is all that matters in the here-and-now. To paraphrase Robert Green Ingersoll, we must live the best we can on Earth and let the gods rule the heavens as they see fit.

The notion that atheists cannot be good people has empirically harmful effects upon atheists. In many parts of the world, they are discriminated against, imprisoned and killed. This harmful slander upon atheists does not exist in a vacuum. As Mills points out, "Such religious bigotry is no less offensive than claiming that a man born African American or Chinese is for that reason more likely to commit immoralities." (ibid)

Mills adds intellectual depth and breadth to his book by including an interview he gave on atheism. This is a great way to answer a lot of questions that theists have about atheists and atheism. He shows how ridiculous it is to look at all of the apparent beauty and design in the universe while ignoring its disorder and ugliness (which he calls selective observation.) He tells the interviewer:

Cancer is, for the most part, a naturally occurring *disorder*, which all too frequently afflicts, and prematurely kills, innumerable animal and plant lifeforms. Did you know that plants suffer cancer too? So while Nature is at times beautiful and purposeful, it is just as often vicious and chaotic. For every new baby "miraculously" born in the maternity ward, there is, down the hall, a lonely old man dying a torturous death in the cancer ward. (p. 31)

The author also has a refreshing answer to the meaning of life question. He says that there does not have to be any one meaning of life. (Moreover, the meaning of life certainly does not have to be about God.) He maintains that there might be many different meanings of life, and that it is up to each person to choose the meaning that is best for them.

Last but not least, Mills demonstrates how Jesus blew a great opportunity to win converts and improve the world:

Jesus...squandered His alleged supernatural powers on frivolous nonsense. Instead of bringing mankind a cure for heart disease and cancer, He used His magic to curse a fig tree. Instead of ending birth defects and infant mortality, he filled pigs with demons. Instead of ending world hunger and illiteracy, He conjured up a jug of wine. What an incredible waste of omnipotence!

These gems are just a few of the reasons why so many atheists, including Richard Dawkins, consider *Atheist Universe* to be “an admirable work.” I could not agree more.