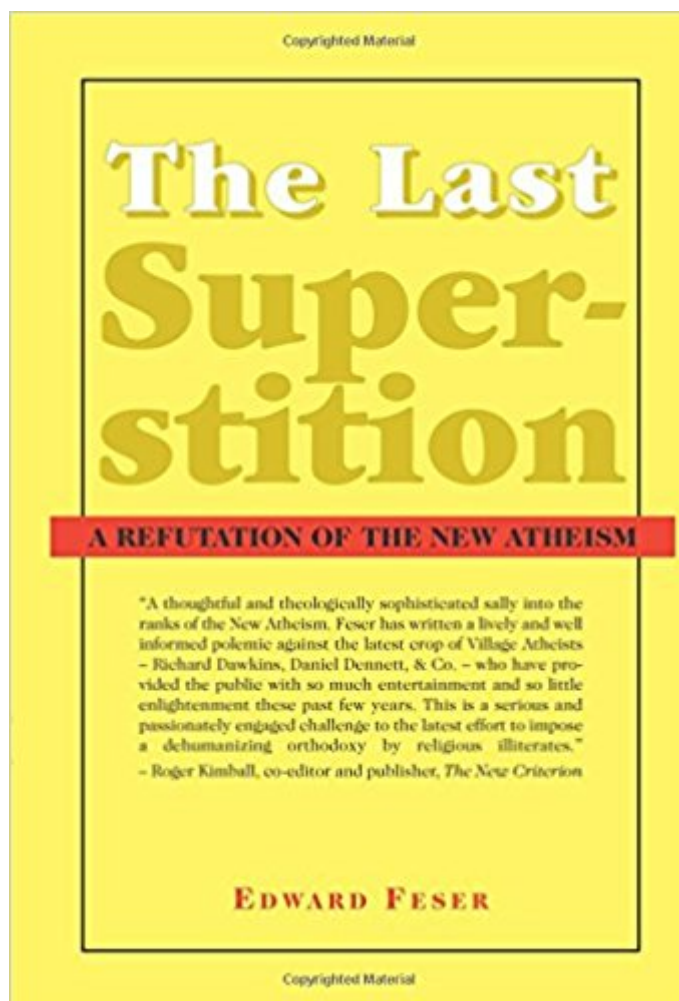


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# The Last Superstition: A Refutation Of The New Atheism



## Synopsis

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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## Customer Reviews

**\*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 --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"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, has not 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 --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

My husband is a Catholic in an apologetics dialogue with several atheists. I purchased this for him due to the many recommendations I've heard on EWTN, specifically from Dr. David Anders. What a hit! He can't put it down. I hear him chuckling over it to himself. It seems to validate many of his instinctive responses to his interlocutors, and it gives him a new framework for understanding the debate -- namely that the classical philosophy of Aristotle has been, to our great injury, abandoned by moderns.

A brilliant philosophical refutation of the New Atheist movement. Feser's logic is impeccable as he exposes the ignorance and philosophical illiteracy of the New Atheists. I have long been frustrated by the vast majority of atheists who think they so much smarter than theists, yet when they open their mouths it's immediately clear that they couldn't pass an intro-to-philosophy course. This book satisfies that frustration nicely.

Edward Feser thoroughly debunks the arguments, or rather pseudo-arguments, of the New Atheists. *THE LAST SUPERSTITION* is most informative, written in a clear and easy to understand style, and is hard-hitting and entertaining to the last. Feser exposes the new Village Atheists (Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens & Co.) for their philosophical bankruptcy, sophistry and intellectual dishonesty. It's safe to say that these modern sophists have not the wherewithal to counter Feser's critique with anything even resembling a valid or legitimate counter-argument of their own.

Reading this book has motivated me to buy two more books by Feser. If you can take the time and effort to walk through Feser's tutorial on Aristotelian/Thomist metaphysics it is well worth it. After you understand it, you wonder why Philosophy went so far off the rails starting in the 17th/18th centuries, and why it remains in such a sterile, confused state today. We should throw out all the so-called "progress" of modern Philosophy starting with Descartes and just go back to St Thomas Aquinas.

"The Last Superstition" is billed as a refutation of the new atheism. It is such a refutation, but it is so much more. It is a crash-course in classical metaphysics, its history, and its rejection by the early moderns. It explores how this rejection led to the catastrophic state in which the modern world lives. And it shows that the reality of God is necessarily entailed by the recognition that Plato and Aristotle were right after all. Feser begins the book by introducing the reader to the work of the Hellenistic philosophers: is only change real, or is only stasis real? Such was the dispute between Parmenides and Heraclius. Does logic entail that one runner, even if he runs faster than the one ahead of him, could never surpass his opponent? Such was one of Zeno's paradoxes. Each of these thinkers posed questions which they left for others to answer, and the answers began to come with the work of Plato and Aristotle. Plato held that both change and stasis were real, since everything which has a nature has the nature it does in virtue of participation in an ideal form. The form constitutes a nature most fully realized. Triangles, for example, can be instantiated in the world, but perfect triangularity cannot be: it exists in this ideal realm, which is static. Aristotle developed Plato's insights, arguing that the forms were immanent in the world and elucidating his four causes: material, formal, efficient, and final. It is Aristotle's four causes which form the driving force of the book. Feser shows how the Thomistic arguments for the reality of God depend on the validity of classical metaphysics, and he shows how this metaphysical portrait is unavoidable. For example, Thomas' teleological argument was not that of the modern "intelligent design" movement (I am more positive on ID than Feser is), but rather on final causes inherent in created things. The final cause of human reason, for example, is discovery of truth. The final cause of an acorn is its oak. And those potentialities are intrinsic to the nature of a thing, so that even if one can never think rationally (due to the failure of secondary capacities in fetal development or elsewhere), one is still intrinsically a rational animal. The ethical consequences are profound: a fetus, at the moment of conception, has the same human nature that the rest of us have, and thus the same natural rights. Teleology is so inescapable that modern science, which claims to reject final causation, uses teleological language

constantly. The purpose of DNA is to encode information. The purpose of the brain is to think. And so forth. Moreover, the so-called "mind-body" problem is another result of rejecting Aristotle. Descartes was a substance dualist, but he thought that body and soul were not related intrinsically: one could be contemplated without the other. Hence, animals had no minds. Our bodies were machines. This created the interaction problem: how do two such radically different substances interact? But on the classical view, the soul constitutes the formal cause of the body, and is thus related intrinsically to it. I believe that the so-called "missing heritability problem" can only be resolved when scientists realize that the missing inheritance is coming from the formative soul. There's so much more. Feser has a devastating critique of Locke, Descartes, Hobbes, and Hume. He pulls no punches with the early moderns or with our contemporaries. The worldview of classical theism remains as true and as unassailable as it always has been. This is in my top five books of all time. You must read it.

Giving it 5 stars not because it's perfect but because this book, and hopefully more like it, give our culture the opportunity to stop and think, actually think, about why we are going where we are going. Feser makes a compelling case that modern thought does not have reason at its core. At the core is the modern disdain for the Divine. But whereas many writers can show that modernity has anything except reason at its core Feser also presents us with an alternative. An alternative that is very easy to follow intellectually if one is willing to follow the evidence wherever it leads. And that alternative is not something new, but something old. Something discarded not because it was intellectually discordant but because modern man did not like the conclusions one is forced to make because of it. This book gives you a good overview of Greek thought and how it moved to the Middle Ages through the Scholastic movement. It shows how the foundation of modern thought is the rejection of reason (here Feser is not new, but this is a required topic for a book of this kind). It also shows how so many of the conclusion of the modern New Atheist movement is based not on fact, reason and intellect, but a wish. A wish that there is no God. But in the end this book would be just as good if it did not address New Atheist claims. It presents the foundation of reason and logic in philosophical thinking and is useful not just for the refutation of poorly conceived ideas, but for examining your own worldview as well.

If you've read "The God Delusion" by Richard Dawkins or similar books by Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, or any of the New Atheists, you owe it to yourself to read an intelligent rebuttal from a professional philosopher. Feser appeals not to emotional personal experiences or proof-texts from

the Bible, but to reason and philosophy. He shows how belief in a First Cause is rational, and disbelief in one absurd.

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