

In God We Doubt – Confessions of a Failed Atheist by John Humphrys.
Hodder and Stoughton 2007.

This is the third book of an unintended trilogy that began with Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* and continued with Christopher Hitchens' *God is not Great*; I describe it as such because John Humphrys' book is both a summary of and an antidote to its angry predecessors.

In the Dawkins and Hitchens books, these luminaries of atheist fundamentalism vent their spleen against organised religion in magnificent, venomous style; John Humphrys, as rigorous in his writing as he is when interviewing on the *Today* programme, reviews their work and chides them for their bile.

In God We Doubt was inspired by a series of three interviews that Humphrys did with three eminent representatives of the Abrahamic faiths – Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, Jonathan Sacks, Orthodox Chief Rabbi, and Tariq Ramadan, professor and Islamic scholar. The stated purpose was for each of them to convince Humphrys that they had a faith worth following, and on the way to answer some very pointed questions: the interviews form the centrepiece of the book, and they are preceded by a review and summary of the main arguments of atheist fundamentalism, and some of its opponents, and followed by a wonderful chapter in which the author details some of the many letters he received following the series. In the final two chapters Humphrys considers the problem of evil and also the way in which human nature, at times divorced from any religious foundation, rises magnificently to the most difficult occasions, and then considers whether the choice facing most human beings is between believing in something or nothing.

In God We Doubt leaves the reader with several positive feelings: one, that we are fortunate to be living at a time when someone of John Humphrys' calibre is alive and well and bringing his acute mind to one of the central issues of the day; two, that in matters of faith it is impossible to be as categorical as the fundamentalists on both sides are, because there is so much that is unknown and unknowable; and three, that the verbiage of religious professionals is often the least convincing testimony to faith, or the value of religion.

This is a wonderful book, and no one who has read Dawkins and Hitchens can afford to ignore it; equally those who have not read them can read John Humphrys on his own and manage perfectly well without the other two!

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