

The Good Book – A Secular Bible made by A.C. Grayling.
Bloomsbury 2011.

It is to be regretted that Anthony Grayling's latest book was overtaken by the controversy that briefly raged over his proposal, together with some other high profile academics, to create a special new centre of learning in London and that was roundly condemned for its elitism by many of the chatterati.

The Good Book – A Secular Bible is exactly what it says on the cover: a book cast in the style of the Bible that is divided into books some of which bear the names of books in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, such as Genesis, Lamentations, Proverbs and Acts. Precisely what the contents of these books might be is revealed by the inside title page, which states 'Conceived Selected Redacted Arranged Worked And In Part Written By A.C. Grayling'.

On one of the final pages of this heavy tome the most used contributing writers to the Good Book are revealed, a list of 124 sources from Aeschylus to Voltaire and including great writers from the ancient to the modern world such as Aristotle, Cicero, Darwin, Huxley, Milton, Montaigne, Spinoza and Grayling. The list is prefaced by the rider 'The Good Book is made from over a thousand texts by several hundred authors and from collections and anonymous traditions...'

Grayling deserves much applause for the feat of pulling all this varied material together in the cogent way in which he has; some of the books are an excellent read, notably those that might come under the rubric of 'Wisdom Literature' but others are less satisfactory. This is more of an observation than a criticism because there is plenty of material in the Bible itself that is turgid and instantly forgettable!

By and large, Anthony Grayling is to be applauded for embarking on a huge task with sensitivity and integrity and producing a text in which secularists and humanists will undoubtedly rejoice and from which people of faith can also learn much.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh