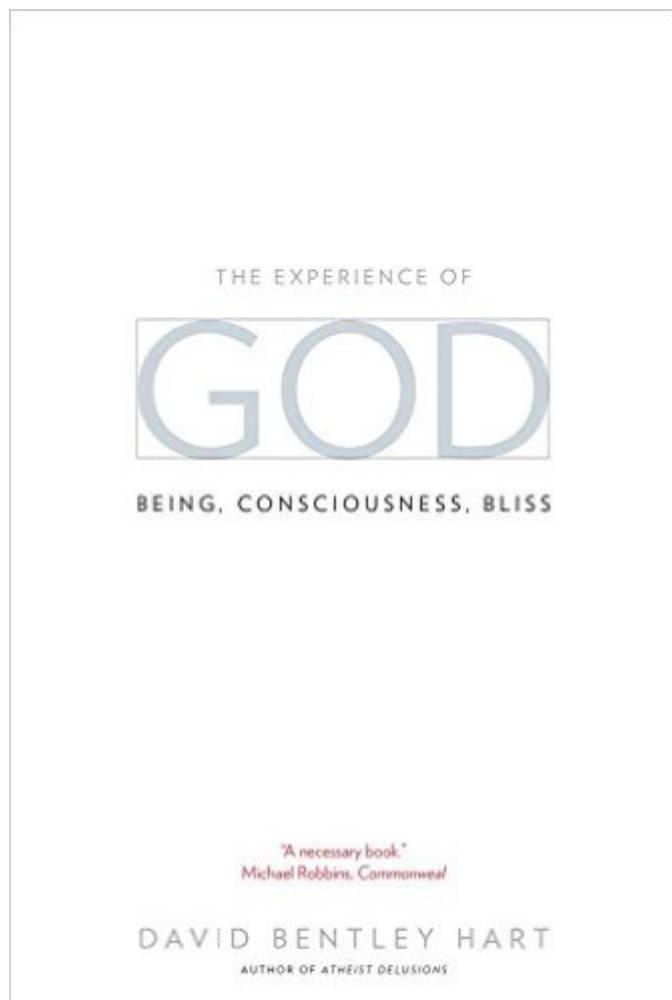


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The Experience Of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss



Synopsis

Despite recent ferocious public debate about the likelihood of the existence of God, the most central concept in such arguments remains strangely obscure. What is God? Are those engaged in the debate all talking about the same thing? In this beautifully written contribution to reasoned discussion, a revered religious thinker clarifies how the word 'God' functions in various religious traditions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

My general preamble to reviews these days starts the same way: I have fallen out of the habit of writing reviews because I think to do a review properly takes the time and energy at this moment in my education I would prefer be spent reading. Nonetheless both the excellence of this book and what in my humble opinion is the poorness of another review, have momentarily called me back. It is of course anyone's right to give a one-star review to a book--even a book I love; in doing so however one would hope cogent reasons other than "I didn't understand it" or vague incriminations of association with a journal one apparently dislikes, would be more than forthcoming. Sadly, such was not the case. That said, I can assure you that my "five-star" rating is not merely serving as a countervalence to the one-star, it is my genuine opinion of the book that would have been given either way. But now that the throat-clearing is done, lets get down to business. Long story short: if you have read Hart and enjoyed his learnedness and witticism in the past, buy this book. If you haven't read Hart but are intrigued: this, or Atheist Delusions, are the places to start. In short: buy this book. Read it, Enjoy it. Pop some popcorn and wait for the fireworks. There really is no second

guessing (especially at the affordable price). I was initially expecting something of a sequel to *Beauty of the Infinite* (which I still consider my favorite of Hart's books, despite its difficulty) but really for those interested I would consider this more akin to *Atheist Delusions* than anything.

Well, this is a tough one for stars. On the one hand, the arguments are right on the mark. I especially like how Hart places the arguments of new atheists and creation scientists/fundamentalists within a shared world view that diminishes the whole idea of God to begin with -- call it materialist or naturalist, once you begin with those post-Enlightenment habits of seeing the world you've pretty much written a coherent notion of God out of the picture. And Hart is very good at pointing out the lumbering absurdities of such an approach. He's also very good at ripping through the just-so stories of evolutionary psychology (aka in an earlier guise, sociobiology). So on the merits of argument, he gets a very high score. My problems with the book are really two: (1) It would be twice as good a book if it were half as long. Hart needs to learn some restraint. He's too besotted with his prose, trying to effect, I suppose, a tweedy Oxonian style that just gets tiresome for most contemporary American readers. I don't want to call it pretentious, but it is annoying how it calls attention to itself and gets in the way of the ideas. (2) More problematic for me is this undercurrent of what I can only call "anger" muddying his robust attacks on the new atheists. It's certainly true that they deserve to have their goofy illogic and ignorance unmasked and Hart does this with abandon. But his evident contempt for them takes on this unsettling character of boot-stomping that feels unpleasant, defensive, and ... well ... mean. It's either that or Hart is too fond of his own erudition -- an arrogance, probably better founded, that actually mimics that of the Dawkins, Dennett, Grayling crowd. But where their smugness is laughable, Hart's is more of a concern.

With works like "The Beauty of the Infinite," David Bentley Hart has already established himself as one of the most talented metaphysicians and theologians alive today. The man is clearly a genius. But occasionally, he bothers to write books that provide a public service for those of us who aren't academics--namely, books that offer a corrective to modern misunderstandings about religion, history, philosophy, and theology ("Atheist Delusions" was one such book). And now, with the publication of "The Experience of God," Dr. Hart has delivered another much-needed antidote to modern misunderstandings of the "God question"--what is God? There are lots of books attempting to "defend" or "refute" the existence of God, but strangely enough, not many books attempting to explain just what exactly the word "God" is supposed to mean. And those that do make such an

attempt (at least the ones that I've seen) fall short in numerous ways. One such shortcoming seems to me to be the failure to grapple with the various religious traditions of the world, which is no easy task, but certainly one that is necessary for any thoughtful person who wants to have a coherent account of the traditional meaning of "God." In this magnificent work, Dr. Hart does exactly that, aptly citing some of the greatest religious thinkers to reveal what the word "God" has traditionally meant across philosophical and theological faith traditions. Don't get me wrong. Hart is not here engaging in the sort of naïve pluralism that says that all religions are saying the same thing; he is aware that there are clear theological differences across religious traditions, and he is respectful of those differences.

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