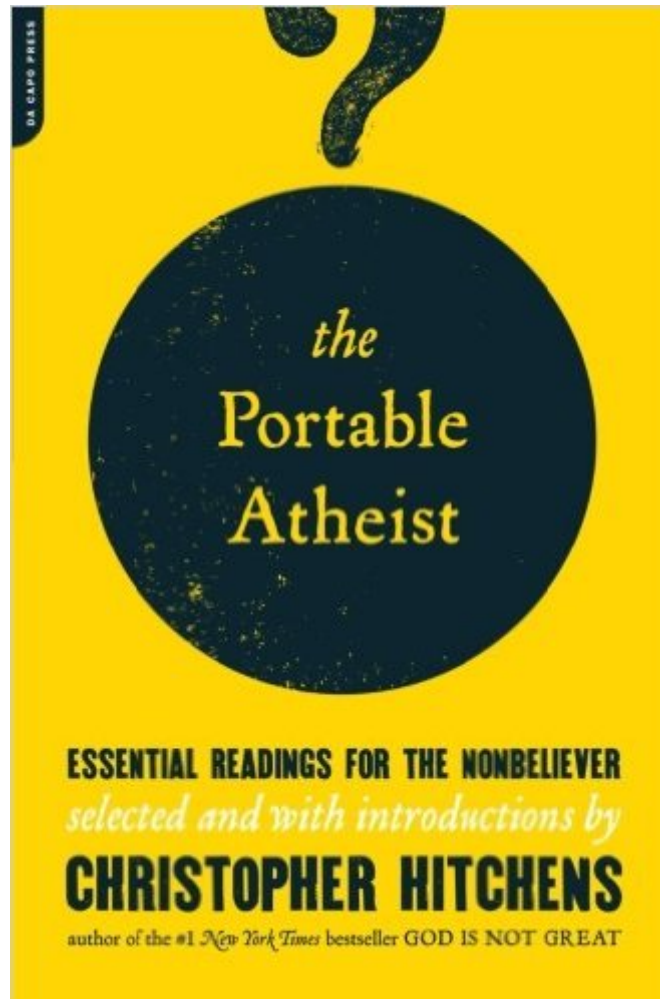


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The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings For The Nonbeliever



Synopsis

From the #1 New York Times best-selling author of *God Is Not Great*, a provocative and entertaining guided tour of atheist and agnostic thought through the ages--with never-before-published pieces by Salman Rushdie, Ian McEwan, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Christopher Hitchens continues to make the case for a splendidly godless universe in this first-ever gathering of the influential voices--past and present--that have shaped his side of the current (and raging) God/no-god debate. With Hitchens as your erudite and witty guide, you'll be led through a wealth of philosophy, literature, and scientific inquiry, including generous portions of the words of Lucretius, Benedict de Spinoza, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Mark Twain, George Eliot, Bertrand Russell, Emma Goldman, H. L. Mencken, Albert Einstein, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and many others well-known and lesser known. And they're all set in context and commented upon as only Christopher Hitchens--political and literary journalist extraordinaire • (Los Angeles Times)--can. Atheist? Believer? Uncertain? No matter: *The Portable Atheist* will speak to you and engage you every step of the way.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Hitchens prefaces his book by telling us that the prehistory of our species is ridden with episodes of nightmarish ignorance and calamity, for which religion is used to identify not just the wrong explanation but the wrong culprit as well. The few men of science and reason and medicine had all they could do to keep their libraries and laboratories intact, or their very lives safe from

harm. Today's typical "justification" for religion involves charitable or humanitarian work - obviously this says nothing about the veracity of the belief systems involved. All religions must, at their core, look forward to the end of this world; atheists, on the other hand argue that this world is all we have and that it is our duty to make the most of it. It is one thing, per Hitchens, to believe that the magnificence of the natural order strongly implies an ordering force; quite another to say this creative force cares for our human affairs, and it is interested in with whom we have sex and how, as well as the outcome of battles and wars (and even athletic contests). Even accepting Jesus' birth, it still does not prove he was more than one among many shamans and magicians of the day. Einstein took the view that the miracle is that there are no miracles. Everybody is an atheist in saying that there is a god in which he does not believe - atheists simply go one step further and add another god to not believe in. Sadly, there are the seemingly endless wars and persecutions that go on in the name of religion.

Come to think of it, I've never seen anyone passing out atheist tracts on a street corner or in a parking lot or anywhere else, for that matter. Nor, when the doorbell rings, do I have to worry about being hammered with some unbeliever's version of the atheist's bible. No, a person pretty much has to seek out ammunition for unbelief on his own. For darn sure, no big name foundation, is going to set up a TV channel or any other promotional that goes against the nation's number one industry-- organized religion. So, as atheists in a nation officially "under God", unbelievers are pretty much on their own. But organized or not, deniers have been around for some time, as Hitchens' collection of heretical writings demonstrates. Now, I'm not very conversant about the myriad selections available to him, but it looks like the volume is heavy on 20th century works, such as, the literary (Orwell, Conrad, Updike, et al.); the scientific (Sagan, Einstein, Dennett, et al.); the philosophic (Russell, Ayer, Grayling); along with intellectual troublemakers from the world of Islam (Rushdie, Warraq, Ali). It's this latter category that distinguishes the collection, since many of the others are oft anthologized. What's generally missing (except for Mencken) are selections from the rabble-rousers, such as Darrow, Ingersoll, and Bradlaugh whose pulpits did so much to fend off past generations of Bible-belters. Also, readers looking for material on the classic proofs of god's existence (ontology, cosmology, et al)-- including the classic disproof from the existence of evil (theodicy)-- should probably look elsewhere. Now, I respect Hitchens as a public figure for using his high-profile to press the case for unbelief. He's stuck his neck out on the airways big time.

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