

## Review: Making Sense of God by Timothy Keller

This book thinks of the believer and the unbeliever who has doubts about the claims Christianity makes for God. It seeks to argue that faith in God is the best way to become moral and it satisfies the needs of the human heart. It gives evidence for God but purports to give evidence why faith in God is a beneficial thing.

Here we are looking at the evidence part for if the evidence is useless then the benefit claim collapses.

Keller reminds us that eugenics and race sciences are not the fake sciences we want them to be. They are science. They work. He writes about the Nazis as follows, "The death camps aroused the moral intuition that eugenics, while perhaps scientifically efficient, is evil. Yet if you believe that it is, you must find support for your conviction in some source beyond science and the strictly rational cost-benefit analysis of practical reason."

*But if God made us need science and assists in science then if God makes eugenics make sense then he is endorsing it. Even if he makes it understandable that is a problem, We can argue that science is just science and it is not created by a divine purpose or any purpose. It just is. That is why we can still condemn eugenics even if testing shows it is the best way to go. Random inventions are not all good. Thus we show that atheism need not lead to anything like what the Nazis did.*

*Keller tries to argue that the gross evil of the Second World War discredited eugenics not science. This is a very dangerous statement. It says that racism is scientific. It in fact is not. Eugenics was based on an ideological lie that one race is not as good at something as another. But imagine if that were true. There is a bigger picture. If the white person is better at colonisation than any person of another colour is that anything great? No. What seems lacking is made up for in other ways. If you get more scientists in one race than another then the reason is opportunity. Nobody can prove there is something inherently scientifically superior in white people. Nobody really sees any war as an argument against eugenics. It is an insult to the deaths of millions to use that argument.*

Admiring beautiful things such as art mean that "it will impoverish you to remind yourself that this feeling is simply a chemical reaction - and nothing more. You will need to shield yourself, from your own secular view of things." To impose an illusion on yourself means it will be a lot of effort to let yourself like and appreciate anything.

*But even if God made all these things they are still made up of components. Even then if you keep analysing them too much you will not enjoy them. God or not, feelings are down to how your genes make you have feelings. We know that alcohol is causing us to feel good but we still think its beautiful and makes life beautiful. Keller fails to understand psychology.*

He writes that faith "is not produced strictly by emotional need, nor should it be. Many - have reluctantly moved toward religion not out of emotional need but because faith in God makes more sense of life than unbelief."

*It is good he says faith is not about feelings. Indeed if it were it would be changing all the time for feelings are never the same. Faith that is that unstable is not faith at all. It also belittles real strong faith.*

*He goes on to say that many unbelievers shift to belief and faith simply because they make sense and it is not for emotional reasons. How many people having that experience want the feeling that comes from life making sense rather than making sense is not clear. Those who are after the feeling of making sense are still chasing faith and exploiting it to get a feeling.*

*You may chase faith to avoid a bad feeling or chase it to get a good one. Both times it is all about emotional reasons.*

*Keller contradicts himself by approving of how St Augustine said that our hearts are restless until they find God. God should not be putting torture in us to force us to him either.*

Keller says that the view that that you can only believe something if it is proven to you suffers from fatal problems. "For one thing, it cannot meet its own standard." You cannot prove that you should only believe what you can prove.

*I answer that the problem does not weaken the rightness and desirability of believing only proven things but enhances them. It means you must strive for proof and want it even if you can't seem to have it. You get as close as you can to real proof. You keep investigating. Investigate even after you make up your mind in case you are wrong. Faith is about believing what you keep trying to prove. Faith is not satisfied with being faith. That is why the faith promoters are tricking you.*

Keller says that if we should not believe something unless we can test it by using our senses, the problem is we end up with no way to show from testing that that is all we should believe.

*It doesn't mean you should give up trying. Just get as close as you can to testing. If you cannot see or hear then get the next best thing. If there is no test then keeping wishing there were one. Keep trying to test and that will get you far. Value testing as much not less. So if we cannot always use empirical tests and proofs, that does not mean that the view that the ideal is to believe only what is testable is wrong. It means the ideal is as valid as ever.*

Keller points out that "few of our convictions about truth can be proven scientifically." Most truths and the most important ones cannot be shown to be true or likely to be true by science.

*For Keller, the existence of a God of love is the most important truth of all. That is what he is driving at. But if we had to choose God or right and wrong we would choose the latter. We have to decide that if morality is real that we want it to be real for it is no good otherwise. Then if it is true that God and morality go together we have to work that out. Some of the most important truths can be shown to be true without science but God cannot be that important.*

*A few scientific truths only means that science is indeed valid and in no sense weakens it. A unit of teachings and propositions where nothing is proved is dirt compared to a unit that shows it can prove some teachings and propositions even if not all. Proof is so important that quality not quantity matters.*

*Keller says that looking for proof leads to people rejecting religion for it cannot prove itself true. So they go to science instead. What we just said shows that those people are right. What cannot prove anything at all is best avoided.*

Keller shows we always think as if we have proof. Reason he says has to argue from reason that it is true which is like saying that a car salesman tells the truth because he swears he does. I would add that using reason and science and forms of investigation and drawing conclusions and creating beliefs for yourself is supremely self-confident and self-asserting.

*Reason arguing for reason is not the same thing as the car salesman. We cannot stop reasoning and even if we think reason is rubbish we are thinking it is rubbish which means reasoning. Reason is a default activity. Keller does not want us to think that for he wants us to feel that reason as reason is okay but we need God along with it to validate it. But the fact is that the word of reason judges even the word of God. God or nobody else can do anything about the fact that reason judges him.*

Keller says that to say that there is a transcendental reality beyond this world such as God or whatever is a philosophical not a scientific proposition. He says that the denial that this reality exists is also a philosophical and not a scientific proposition. He says there is no way to test which one is true beyond all doubt and warns that "the declaration that science is the only arbiter of truth is not itself a scientific finding. It is a belief."

*But philosophy is not in a bubble. It has to get data from science and other things and work out what deeper meaning if any is there. Philosophers if they could not sense the world or test for it would get nowhere.*

*If the transcendent reality hypothetically was not an immaterial spirit or we had machines to detect that then it would be a scientific not just a philosophical matter. We cannot call it a non-scientific matter just because we have no way of detecting it. A rock on Mars is a scientific matter even if we will never find it. To say, "We cannot*

*detect spirit therefore it is a transcendental matter not a scientific one" is illogical and does not follow. Keller like all Christians is trying to protect God and spirit from being savaged by science and make excuses for saying they are real.*

*If you cannot test the supernatural in a lab that does not mean it cannot be tested. It only means there is no direct test.*

*Science may test for something indirectly so here we have religion saying the supernatural must not agree to a test of that indirect nature. It is just trying to stop the supernatural from being subject to testing.*

*Testing is essential if you care about truth at all so the science method, the test method, is not a mere belief but a necessity.*

*Keller suggests that knowing a religious organisation is corrupt or hypocritical "might be the most warranted basis for doubting the truth of a particular faith."*

*A particular faith? Faith is faith! The best religion in the world being carried by hypocrites means anything else can only be worse. Faith and religion are related and the trouble could be in both.*

*If hypocrisy is a reason for thinking your religion is not what it claims to be then error or bad doctrine is a bigger and better reason. As lies lead to more lies and lies need protecting to thrive hypocrisy can be a sign that the religion is false or just a human construct. Truth and justice are inseparable. He says the answer to the problem is that if you think Christianity is false for there are too many hypocrites in it, then they indeed should be if the religion is false! Hypocrisy is only a problem if the religion is true and it is an abuse of the religion. But no matter how wrong a religion is that does not give anybody the right or permission to be a hypocrite. They know where the door is.*

*If hypocrisy is a reason to depart a religion or ignore it, then error or bad doctrine is a bigger reason. A religion of errors and lies is to blame for the hypocrites in its midst for errors and lies demand that hypocrites protect them! Hypocrites need a lying religion to thrive for they can use the lies and errors to protect themselves.*

*Keller says that to say there is no God is to say that whatever exists exists on its own without support. He says that God is the reason anything exists or does anything.*

*It could be that the support is just an energy and knows nothing and is not like a person in any sense.*

*Keller says you cannot conclusively prove God but you can only show that he probably exists. That is a God then who probably exists. Keller says that everybody has God just not always the right God. The atheist has God too - it is whatever he has chosen to love as God in God's place.*

*The likelihood of God existing is interesting for it is possible to make the likelihood your God not him. Keller wrote, "nonbelief in God is an act of faith." That shows that anything to do with God or denying him can be your god not God.*

*Keller writes, "To hold that human being are the product of nothing but the evolutionary process of the strong eating the weak, but then to insist that nonetheless every person has a human dignity to be honoured - is an enormous leap of faith against all evidence to the contrary."*

*But is the leap of faith really bad? It sounds like if you are going to leap that is the leap you should take. And evolution or not, the strong does devour the weaker and always has. Both atheists and believers are still taking that leap. They are leaping as far as each other. Why do you want to put people off the leap by making it look too big to be worth taking? Who says the leap has to be that big or that any person has to see it as big? What is wrong with just taking the leap?*

*Keller points out that if you believe in things you get a pile of tacit beliefs with them. He calls them "barely perceived supportive beliefs." He explains as with any belief, and this can apply to non-religious belief, or faith, "When people are presented with the Christian faith, the actual doctrines are often given against a backdrop of*

other implicit beliefs, attitudes, and expectations." He gives one example, "ideas about what nonbelievers must be like." And another, "If I am a Christian, and God loves me, there's a limit to how badly life can go for me." The latter he clarifies is not formal Christian doctrine and is refuted by the cruel death of Christ. The implication is that it is a sin to assume that doing the right thing should protect you from things going to an extreme.

To recap and develop on that, faith in value and purpose are tacit beliefs. The believers barely perceive that they have them. I like the expression tacit beliefs. For Keller, if he wants to say that unbelievers are more believers in God than they think - tacitly accepting ideas that go with God and are implied by God, then what can he say if atheists think believers tacitly accept beliefs and attitudes and ideas that refute or undermine God and contradict God?

Keller writes, "The Meaning of life cannot be destroyed by adversity. If, for example, your Meaning in life is to know, please, emulate, and be with God, then suffering can actually enhance your Meaning in life, because it can get you closer to him. Anthropologists have observed that all nonsecular cultures give their members resources for actually being edified by suffering. Though not welcoming it, they see it as meaningful and help toward the ultimate goal."

*The experience of many is that meaning is destroyed by adversity. It is cruel to say any different.*

He goes on to argue that secular people who see suffering as accidental and meaningless are indicating that life is no good if suffering is terrible enough. It denies the goodness of all life both when it is happy or unhappy.

*If suffering really is a help or an opportunity to grow then you have to welcome it in some way. The solution is to grow in spite of suffering. That makes you bigger than it. Not all secularists think life should be ended if suffering is bad enough. Some that think it should be may hold that it is never bad enough to justify giving up.*

*Would religious people agree with rejecting euthanasia/falling into an eternal sleep, if they could live forever in tremendous torment? I am not talking about hell or punishment for sin. What if we just had a universe of suffering?*

Keller tells us how the philosopher Nagel argued that life becomes meaningless only if you insist that it must have meaning. Keller writes, "If the universe is truly indifferent and meaningless, why think it ought not to be that way?"

*This is the idea that if you stop hurting yourself by trying to feel life has meaning and give up then you will be free of that pain and able to be free. Freedom makes your life feel meaningful even it is not. But if you experience meaning it is not true that the universe is all meaningless. You are part of it and that part is meaningful. There may be more meaninglessness in the universe than meaningfulness but that makes the meaning more valuable not less. It is stronger in a sense than a universe of complete meaning. It is stronger than the meaning you try to get from the idea of God.*

*Even if there is a meaning in life from God it does not follow that any particular believer is using it that way but may be using the self-flagellating way of getting meaning. They may want to see others hurt instead of guiding them to feel there is no meaning and thus feeling free.*

*We do not think the universe ought to be meaningful. Whether ought means ought as in how an apple ought to fall randomly or in a moral personal sense we do not think it ought. We think we ought to be here simply because we are and can stay for a time. We treat the can as an ought though a can is not an ought!*

*If Nagel is right then why are believers in religion and God saying you need both God and religion to have meaning for they ought to give you meaning? Surely then that will backfire! This sounds like the idea that it is forgetting about meaning makes you act and feel you have got it. That is not the same as really having it. If forgetting gives you meaning then that is conclusive proof that meaning is imposed by us on how we see things and is not part of what reality is about. Seek and you will find. That is what happens in a universe that is about meaning and giving meaning.*

*Tea makes you sick. If tea does not make you sick if you forget you hate its taste and drink it then that does not*

*mean the tea is responsible for you not being sick. It means it is to blame. And more so than ever! Forgetting the universe has no meaning makes you feel you have meaning but this is nothing to do with the universe. It is still to "blame" for not giving you meaning.*

*Keller then says that if life and existence have no meaning then any attempt to create meaning yourself will fail and not last. But that assumes the universe does not intend us or let us make our own sense of meaning - give meaning to our own life.*

*If it is true that there is no God and no ultimate meaning and no religion has the way to ultimate meaning then Keller has admitted that those things lead to moral and emotional destruction. A religion that fails to get the meaning it craves will take it out on others and on the innocent and may explain why palpably silly faiths are so bad and vicious.*

Conclusion: To refute this book with its intensely strong arguments for faith and for God is to say all that needs to be said in favour of atheism. Atheism just cannot be wrong.