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# **Is Belief In God Good, Bad Or Irrelevant?: A Professor And A Punk Rocker Discuss Science, Religion, Naturalism & Christianity**



## Synopsis

Greg Graffin is frontman, singer and songwriter for the punk band Bad Religion. He also happens to have a Ph.D. in zoology and wrote his dissertation on evolution, atheism and naturalism. Preston Jones is a history professor at a Christian college and a fan of Bad Religion's music. One day, on a whim, Preston sent Greg an appreciative e-mail. That was the start of an extraordinary correspondence. For several months, Preston and Greg sent e-mails back and forth on big topics like God, religion, knowledge, evil, evolution, biology, destiny and the nature of reality. Preston believes in God; Greg sees insufficient evidence for God's existence. Over the course of their friendly debate, they tackle such cosmic questions as: Is religion rational or irrational? Does morality require belief in God? Do people only believe in God because they are genetically predisposed toward religion? How do you make sense of suffering in the world? Is this universe all there is? And what does it all matter? In this engaging book, Preston and Greg's actual e-mail correspondence is reproduced, along with bonus materials that provide additional background and context. Each makes his case for why he thinks his worldview is more compelling and explanatory. While they find some places to agree, neither one convinces the other. They can't both be right. So which worldview is more plausible? You decide.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Jones proffers a case for Christianity that is free of biblical proof-texting, which non-believers might find refreshing. (Bradford McCall for Religious Studies Review, April 2007) Here is an e-mail

exchange like few others. I would recommend it for anyone interested in how a Christian and an anti-Christian can intelligently and peacefully interact. (Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith, June 2007)"I've overheard numerous conversations but none as captivating as this. Greg Graffin and Preston Jones disagree agreeably while discussing the things that matter most. I learned from both, grew in appreciation for the creative music of Bad Religion and reflected on how better to flesh out my faith in a pluralistic world. I hope all my friends accept their invitation to listen in. This is a book that needs to be not just read, but discussed." (Denis D. Haack, Director, Ransom Fellowship, Editor, Critique, and visiting instructor in practical theology, Covenant Seminary)"In books that seek to commend the Christian faith, often the conversation is one-sided, lacking 'apologetic tension.' Not so with this new work edited by Preston Jones. In a dynamic conversation (actually an e-mail exchange) between Jones, the Christian history professor, and punk rocker Greg Graffin over matters of consequence, we see elements of Christian theism and scientific naturalism going head to head. I was drawn deeply into their intellectual volleys, their spiritual perspectives and their friendship. I also learned about books and issues that were new to me. This work is a model of civility on the part of both parties, and an enlightening one at that!" (David Naugle, professor of philosophy, Dallas Baptist University, and author of Worldview: The History of a Concept)"A good spirited conversation can be very educational. It gives people the freedom to draw their own conclusions, which is usually more powerful than forcing one down the reader's throat. Preston Jones has 'authored' a great read simply by keeping the conversation true to what was 'said' via his e-mails with Bad Religion frontman Greg Graffin. This collection of back-and-forth debate concerning the worldviews of a naturalist and a Christian is fascinating and as compelling as a suspense novel, as educational as a college course and as relational as a blog. Anyone young enough to love rock and roll and smart enough to know that the Christian faith needn't back down from any philosophy will appreciate the frankness found inside this book." (Doug Van Pelt, editor of HM Magazine, and author of Rock Stars on God)

Features & Benefits \* Email discussion between a Christian history professor and a naturalist punk rocker with a Ph.D.\* Tackles cosmic questions about biology, suffering, destiny, morality and more\* Engages youth and students with "big ideas"\* Unique and compelling\* Models effective dialogue between people with differing worldviews\* Can be used as a text for philosophy, theology, apologetics or worldview courses\* Includes a study/discussion guide

I am a person who likes to educate myself on people of different beliefs, I bought this because it

seemed relevant to what I was writing about and I wanted to learn more. I think that overall this book is very good and I am now a Bad Religion fan. I think that overall that Christianity has become irrelevant to much of the world since it has failed to answer some of the most basic questions humans have. This makes it relevant for people to seek the truth in whatever way works for them. After reading this, I think I found the answer that I was looking for. I now have decided that belief in God is irrelevant. The fact that two people with such completely opposite viewpoints can agree to disagree and have a conversation is proof to me that there is a chance for a better world with or without the divine intervention of a God or whether everyone even agrees on whether a God exists.

This had the outcome I basically expected. The upshot is that reasonable people can have rational, gracious discussions about topics they did and still do disagree on. Reminds of Penn Jillette's "Gift of a Bible" clip. I think others' fanboy criticisms are warranted; Preston 'needs' Greg more than vice versa, but I don't think it rises to the level of a problem.

I originally bought this book sheer out of my respect and admiration for Greg Graffin but was incredibly surprised and even a bit humbled by the discussions of Greg and Preston. Tackling some of life's big questions from both a Christian and a Naturalist perspective this book is incredibly thought provoking and will cause one to take a good look at your own belief system as long as you are not entirely closed minded on either of the subjects. Touching on why and how we believe, the presence of God in general and in the actions of people, the dialogue is more thought provoking and captive than anything else I have read on this topic. While Greg and Preston do tend to get a bit aggressive or preachy about their viewpoint, both are able to maintain civility and create an incredible, thought provoking dialogue. On a personal note I have read it cover to cover for the past three days straight and still am finding myself laying in bed into the late hours mulling over what has been said and how my own non conventional spirituality was formed.

Every discussion about God should help us to seek understanding. This conversation between dissimilar individuals with very different perspectives is interesting. Partly because it is between individuals of differing perspectives who show respect for each others views but also for the way the conversation took place. Instead of face to face, it was conducted by writing. At several times while reading it, I wanted to participate and provide additional perspective. It made me think about the subject.

As a Bad Religion fan, I came to reading this book with a pretty firm opinion on the subject matter. While, after finishing the book, I still felt the same way, it was definitely an enlightening book that I feel better for having had read. I don't agree with many of the viewpoints that Preston Jones took, but it was good to hear arguments from both sides so that I can feel more confident in my own views.

This book is a decent and entertaining enough read, however if you are looking for any real resolve or conclusion, you won't find it here. This book reads more like emails from a fan to a celebrity, which at its core is what the book really is. Anyone looking for some deep and challenging conversation between a believer and non-believer should look elsewhere. If you are, as I was, looking to see inside the mind of Greg Graffin, you will get a good glimpse, just don't go into this expecting to be blown away. Entertaining quick read? Yes. Enjoyable? Yes. Deep and life challenging? No.

Excuse the autobiographical introduction, but this is the best manner in which to comment/review as the parallels, aside from our worldviews, are very similar. It is an amazing thing to grow up about 5 years after Greg, but have similar insights into the punk scene of the mid and late-1980's growing up in the South Bay, Hermosa Beach, where Pennywise reigns supreme [Fletcher is an acquaintance]]--and even Venice Beach, which scared the hell out of me because of the violence and backyard brawls that would occur at every party. The Suicidal Tendencies followers were not the kind of people you would be thankful to meet in an alley at night, unless you were one of them. I was listening to Bad Religion since 1983, sometime after Suffer turned me into a real fan. I did not become a full-blown punker until I heard 'Bad Brains' (the "Roar Sessions"); which, coincidentally was reproduced with additional tracks on their album "Rock for Light" by Ric Ocasek--a little nugget that only the "real" punkers know from "posers." I didn't know that Ric Ocasek also produced a Bad Religion album. Like the character that Jack Black plays in the movie High Fidelity, as one punk hangout are also local record shops where Ian MacCaye-like worshippers held details beyond the song lyrics such as useless knowledge about album labels and production artists.[For those reviewers that do not know (ie., reviews that purchased this book out of curiosity as it provides some insights in a naturalistic worldview and its etiology--Darwinism). Poser is a term within our "social network" when you first begin dressing like a punker in High school or earlier. Besides getting your assed kicked by real punks, it was a curious phenomenon that the test of being a true

punk rocker was (1) knowledge and taste in music, (2) time, and (3) who your knew. That is to say, after dressing like a punker for 3+ years and visiting enough backyard parties (and brawls) you are inevitably accepted into the punk rock subculture, which is no easy task in the south Bay area]. I am now 41-years, I have been married 16-years to the most beautiful girl in the South Bay, we have two children, and I am a practicing attorney. Although I listen to Bob Marley while I am in my office, it is Against the Grain and Suffer on my drive home. My respect for the depth of Bad Religion ("BR") lyrics--especially when they are sung so quickly in certain songs--has not waned, and neither had my respect for BR and their music. My respect for Dr. Graffin's subscription to "Naturalism" as his worldview (naturalism is capitalized because Greg considers it a new religion) has remained consistent as you read Anarchy Evolution, articles, the e-mail correspondence with a Dr. Preston Jones that was turned into a book, Is Belief in God, Good, Bad or Irrelevant? ("BGGDI") et al. I will finish this book before tracking down Greg in a different venue. The only problem(s) with the latter is that Dr. Preston is not a philosopher of science, the statements Greg makes in BGGDI that he avoids "anything written by `Christian' scholars"--whatever that means--and his affiliation and ongoing friendship/project with his thesis advisor Will Provine (who has much influence over Dr. Graffin's thoughts)--prove to contradict much of what is averred by way of reality, knowledge, and a causal story which is painfully vague in Anarchy Evolution. Moreover, chapter 8 of Anarchy Evolution seems to be somewhat distracting to the overall "goal" of the book (unless this is merely supposed to be an autobiography, or go-green propaganda--and it is not), which is the only reason why I gave his book 4-stars. This chapter stood out like a sore thumb. Dr. Provine is very well-known in the world of intelligent design ("ID") proponents, or what Greg unfortunately refers to as "Intelligent design creationism" which in typical conformity with the likes of most volitionally uneducated critics (or witty critics like Eugenie Scott who use idiots to debate the issue in the public square) with the overall goal to place the ID movement on the same par as young earth creationists (e.g., Duane Gish is equivocated with Bill Dembski). Perhaps Michael Ruse is the only philosopher of science that knows about the epistemic aspect of the "wedge" movement. This is difficult to understand and reconcile given Greg's doctrinal thesis which is on the compatibility of evolutionary biology and theology given that you would he would be expected to read many `Christian' scholars to produce such a lengthy paper, but it is to be expected if he fails to read `Christian' scholars and only stick to critiques such as Ken Brown, Robert Pennock (yuck), and even Provine himself. Provine's uses Phillip E. Johnson's Darwin on Trial in his classes [probably one of the only primary resources Greg has read on the issue], and their debate in the 1990's have done much by way of reinforcing Greg's naturalistic worldview (or religion), the thesis of Anarchy Evolution, and his

present project with Will Provine. For those followers of BR, I highly recommend the book as it provides psychological insights to the lyrics of many of the songs Greg has written over the years (e.g., his ian expedition), his pains, divorce, friendships, relative purpose in life and so forth. Moreover, for the diehard fans those that have no background in popular science or neo-Darwinism (and Greg expects that the real truth is to only be gleaned from empiricism and science), the book is still worth reading given the picture Greg provides of punk rock in the mid-1980's which includes his own initiation into the subculture. Putting aside the biography, there are two other streams of thought that are conveyed in Anarchy Evolution. The first, of course, is biological evolution its incompatibility with "religion," and Greg provides some evidences of micro-evolutionary specimens, his view on the role of fitness, and other interesting issues. However, Greg is not preaching Lamarkism and he does not try and disagree with the neo-Darwinian synthesis (chance, mutation, time, and natural selection). His thesis does not provide a real new "mechanism" proposed to Darwinism but downplays well-known aspects of Darwin. Anarchy Evolution is interesting and I will definitely read his doctrinal thesis and the remainder of BGGDI. Again, I agree that true Christianity (and I am obviously a Christian) is incompatible with Darwinism. I am not a young-earth creationist and I am not a theistic evolutionist. I am no Preston Jones either and, like Will Provine, I pull no punches. I hope to contact Greg and provide those empirical arguments for the truth of Christianity in a different venue than . For the reviewers reading this article, I apologize for talking so much about myself, but I am cutting to the chase of the book for those that have the requisite knowledge and can read between the lines. Moreover, I hope that Greg reads his own reviews/comments and provides a response. The second stream that Greg unpacks is Naturalism--more toned down than the exchanges in BGGDI--and which are woefully in need of a challenge as Greg, who takes Naturalism as a Religion, is brainwashed by naturalism-of-the-gaps. For example, much of the derogatory accusations throughout Anarchy Evolution and BGGDI about Christianity and the existence of God, or the use of philosophy can easily applied to his own beliefs in Naturalism. In fact, his book is wrought with philosophical conclusions and presuppositions which make Naturalism the only outcome for his conclusions--typical of methodological naturalism and scientism. Greg does a great job (unlike the so-called "New Atheists") not confusing ontological issues with epistemic issues, but this book was written in a safer manner versus Greg's other writings (and that is what the editing world and advice from thesis advisors are for--i.e., they usually state "be careful."). With that said, Greg is better than Richard Dawkins in logically compartmentalizing the three aspects of any worldview, all of which is broken down into an ontology, epistemology and etiology. The book, aside from the "go green" chapter, is fantastic and interesting for punk rockers, and I apologize for

those reviewers that probably regard much of what is stated in this review as complete bull---! However, unlike BGGDI, it is my hope to bring to Greg a challenge he has never experienced or heard before, and do so within his own worldview and religion. Buy this book if you are a fan, an atheist or a theist, or a reader of popular science. Greg (or Dr. Graffin--intending no incivility) I hope that we have a chance to correspond. I hope to correspond in a different venue and I intend no incivilities with this critique.

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