

# Foreword

BOB NELSON AND I occupied adjacent offices at the University of Maryland School of Public Policy for about fifteen years. This led to many conversations that were pleasant and fruitful because we shared interests in both economics and environmental studies. Also, we agreed in our basic world views enough to make good conversation possible, yet differed enough to make it interesting. So when Bob asked me to read and comment on an earlier draft of this book, I accepted.

To be painfully honest, however, I thought at the time that I knew a bit more about theology and religion than Bob did, and that while I might be useful to him, I doubted that I would learn much from the collegial duty of reading the draft. It quickly became apparent that I was totally mistaken about that—Bob was the teacher and I was his student. How could I have been so wrong? Had Bob been reticent about his knowledge and wide reading in theology? Had I been unperceptive? Had he learned so much in such a short time? Suffice it to say that I came away from reading the draft with a long list of referenced scholars to read, and with many new insights.

The ability to read and absorb vast amounts of material is a capacity that Bob is blessed with. His mind is like a huge sponge that absorbs everything, but what he wrings out of it on to the pages of his own writing is not simply what he absorbed, but rather a high-proof distillation that stimulates further thought and insight.

Bob's approach to religion in his important past scholarly work on *Economics as Religion* had been that of the objective external observer. This book takes the internal approach of a serious prospective believer, weighing the arguments for the existence of God (a generic monotheistic God). His reasoned conclusion is that very probably God exists. He hints that his next book may go further than this.

The world view of scientific materialism has become so dominant on university campuses that a sophomoric atheism, styled the “new atheism,” has become prevalent. It has been preached, aggressively and arrogantly, by Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and others. Many,

whose study of religion ended with first-grade Sunday school, have uncritically accepted their message. As a Christian theist myself, I have had a hard time understanding how such a fundamentalist neo-Darwinist materialism could have, until recently, gotten a critical free pass from the intelligentsia. Nelson, as you will see, doesn't give free passes. Although the thrust of this book is not to debate these thinkers, the self-contradictions of their positions are frequently exposed as by-products of broader discussions, and Nelson helpfully makes the connections, much to my satisfaction.

I believe that other readers will enjoy and benefit from the clear, informed, and honest reasoning in this book as much as I did.

Herman Daly

Emeritus Professor

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