

# Oxonian responds to Hawking: *God's Not Dead*

In the movie *God's Not Dead*, when the Christian student Josh Wheaton debates the point, he makes use of the scholarship of John Lennox, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford, to refute Stephen Hawking's claims about God and the universe.

Josh paraphrases the zinger, from Lennox's book *God and Stephen Hawking*, that "nonsense remains nonsense, even when talked by world-famous scientists."

Stephen Hawking had infamously argued, in his book *The Grand Design*, "because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing," and hence there is no need for God.

Lennox, being not just a mathematician but also a philosopher of science and Christian apologist, furnished Josh with his debating point that Hawking's claim was "illogical" and "blatantly self-contradictory."

"God does not conflict or compete with the laws of physics as an explanation," writes Lennox. "God is actually the ground of all explanation, in the sense that he is the cause in the first place of there being a world for the laws of physics to describe. Offering people the choice between God and science is therefore illogical."

Students of Thomas Aquinas will recognize this as a more colloquial formulation of the key metaphysical truth that God is the "First Cause," the uncreated "Pure Actuality" who gives the world whatever created actuality it does have.

Lennox visited British Columbia in July to give multiple talks responding to the illogical arguments of the "New Atheism." Arnold Sikema, a Professor of Physics at Trinity Western University, organized a private lunch with Lennox out in Langley for a select group of scientists and philosophers. As we dined on an outdoor patio, Lennox was generous with his time and we got to hear amusing stories about his



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personal encounters and public debates with "New Atheist" luminaries like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens.

In conversation, I was impressed by how Lennox strongly returned to a key point from his book, *God and Stephen Hawking*. Common to the atheists who make bad arguments (like Hawking) is their impoverished conception of God, said Lennox, in which they think of him as being simply a "God of the Gaps."

In other words, they think that whenever there is something unexplained by science, a mythological figure is postulated by weak minds to "fill the gap."

They think science needs no such God hypothesis.

In Greek mythology, for example, Zeus is the Greek god of thunder and lightning. Until science can understand what really causes storm phenomena, people will imagine such a god throwing lightning around and making noise. Hawking and other atheist scientists view the Christian God as being the same. For them, God's personal agency functions as a mythical placeholder, reminding science only of what it has to keep working on.

Lennox argues in his book that Hawking confuses "two levels of explanation: agency and law. God is an explanation of the universe, but not the same type of explanation as that which is given by physics," or even Greek mythology.

Sir Frank Whittle invented the jet engine, for example. Lennox likens Hawking's view to someone seeking to "explain the jet engine by saying that it arose naturally from physical law."

Lennox's point is that science can describe *how* the universe works with descriptive laws of physics, just as we can describe how a jet engine works with descriptive

laws of physics, but nevertheless we also require a description of personal agency to fully explain the existence of the jet engine. *Why* does it exist in the first place? In other words, "we need *both* levels of explanation in order to give a complete description."

Lennox provides an invaluable service for those who listen to him in debate. Most people have no idea of how to respond to the wild atheistic claims made by scientists. When scientists say such things, "the general public, not surprisingly, assumes that they are statements of science and takes them on authority," Lennox laments. "That is why it is important to point out that they are not statements of science, and any statement, whether made by a scientist or not, should be open to logical analysis. Immense prestige and au-

thority does not compensate for faulty logic."

Students, like the character Josh in the film *God's Not Dead*, can learn from Lennox about what is philosophically impoverished in the atheist's conception of God.

They can also pursue a philosophically enriched understanding of nature. The philosopher Edward Feser has a superb new book, *Scholastic Metaphysics*, which painstakingly explains what both contemporary scientists and current philosophers are failing to understand about the most fundamental structures of the universe.

Thomas Aquinas' philosophical contributions remain of perennial worth, as Feser recognizes, not least because they help us reconcile with common sense all the most interesting discoveries of modern science.

Not only is God not dead, nature logically leads us to him.

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Agneszka Krawczynski / The B.C. Catholic  
Oxford professor John Lennox speaks at Christian Life Assembly in Langley July 12. Lennox said Hawking's claims about God are "illogical" and "contradictory."