the image of God might have played a greater role in her solution. The Second Adam is the concretization of the divine image and the beginning of nothing less than a new humanity. The return to ‘Jesus the True Image’ in the final pages might have signalled a more decisive end to the arguments about the meaning of male and female in Genesis by starting elsewhere, and following Christ understood less as conformity to that image and more as participation in the new humanity that Christ inaugurates, for in that body ‘there is no longer male and female’.

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Dozens of books reply to, riposte, or aim to refute various ‘New Atheists’, ever since Richard Dawkins published his bestseller, The God Delusion, in 2006. Gary Keogh’s Reading Richard Dawkins: A Theological Dialogue with New Atheism is one of the recent scholarly responses. Although Dawkins and his fellow New Atheist Daniel C. Dennett are among ‘theology’s most adverse critics’ (p. 14), Keogh proposes that theologians can productively interact with them. Keogh writes in his introduction and chapter 1 that he is less concerned to rebut Dawkins, and more determined to entertain Dawkins as a counterintuitive interlocutor.

In chapter 2, Keogh surveys the ‘scientific foundations’ (p. 32) of Dawkins’s evolutionary world-view, conceding that there are inherent limitations to theological engagement with Dawkins. Keogh highlights a lack of consensus among scientists about Dawkins’s gene theories, his high-profile disputes with Stephen J. Gould and other scholars, and his ‘lack of openness to alternative viewpoints’ (p. 59) that at worst may inhibit otherwise fruitful academic research and shut down public debate. At the same time, Keogh appreciates where Dawkins and Dennett pinpoint genuine weaknesses or difficulties in theology or in ‘theistic interpretations of evolution’ (p. 72). Keogh catalogues as
vulnerable to their criticism certain aspects of intelligent design theory, irreducible complexity, evolutionary convergence, and quantum indeterminacy.

Chapter 3 argues that Dawkins and Dennett are themselves susceptible to critique when they employ evolutionary theory ‘beyond biology’ (p. 93) as a hermeneutical device for analysing consciousness, culture, morality, and purpose or lack of purpose in the physical universe. Given that theology is interested in these topics and their implications, each arena constitutes a common overlapping front for ongoing dialogue with New Atheists.

Chapter 4 commends Dawkins’s and Dennett’s evolutionary theories for exploring ‘how religious beliefs and thinking originated and have…been shaped through the process of natural selection in the biological and cultural realms’ (p. 167). Keogh concurrently departs from Dawkins and Dennett to stand with the likes of Alister McGrath, Nancey Murphy, and Alvin Plantinga in asserting that evolutionary explanations for religious phenomena enrich understandings of religion without necessarily nullifying religious truth claims. Readers familiar with Dennett’s depiction of Darwin’s Dangerous Idea as a ‘universal acid’ that dissolves deeply cherished religious assumptions or convictions will recognize Keogh’s contrast with Dennett on this point.

Keogh’s final chapter, ‘Evil, Evolution, and God’, details ways that Dawkins might be an unintentional ‘servant of theology’ (p. 173). First, even though Dawkins at times misapprehends the Bible or theology, this is conceivably due in part to theologians’ failure to communicate effectively. Consequently, Dawkins ‘challenges theology to “awake from its slumber” (Rom. 13:11)...and become a more coherent, constructive, and critical voice in the public forum’ (p. 178). Second, Dawkins invigorates reflection on the problem of evil and theodicy because he under-mines anthropocentric mindsets and reminds theologians that animals, and not simply humans, experience significant suffering. In Keogh’s estimate, Dawkins’s insight into the interrelatedness of all living beings and their environments impels new directions in theology and spurs reinterpretations of the fall, original sin, divine intervention, and hypotheses regarding the idea that non-human creatures enjoy a measure of freedom in addition to eschatological hope.

Keogh sees Dawkins as less helpful in accounting for the suffering that creatures deliberately inflict on each other when there are no discernable threats to their survival. Keogh submits that
Christian theology is also less liable than New Atheists are to charges of nihilism, and that disagreements surrounding such charges supply opportunities for reciprocal critique. Keogh subsequently extols Robert N. McCauley and John Haught’s renderings of ‘explanatory pluralism’ (pp. 214–16, 227, 235) wherein science, theology, and other disciplines diversely and gloriously commiserate instead of fundamentally discrediting or thwarting each other.

To shed further light on why God does not prevent all suffering, Keogh suggests that God’s kenotic self-restraint provisionally allows anguish and immorality to continue so that God’s creatures might exercise true autonomy and growth. Keogh appends to these contentions the Christian ‘promissory vision’ (p. 224) that God will ultimately overcome and put an end to all suffering and evil after they have achieved their redemptive purposes.

Keogh concludes that even if sympathetic dialogue partners ‘may be more beneficial in terms of substance’ (p. 242), theology must grapple honestly with its critics, especially when those critical voices are broadcast in public squares. I offer one proviso. Theology has historically enhanced itself when provoked by so-called heresies, by schismatics, and by belligerent or intellectual representatives of other religious traditions or secularism, along with internal discussions. As a discipline, theology will likewise benefit from contemplating New Atheists, though not every theologian will possess the requisite temperament or skill set to profit from New Atheists’ cross-examinations. A necessary and practical division of labour is needed. To adapt from 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4, some theologians will be better suited to dialogue primarily within their own traditions, others to interfaith or inter-religious conversations, still others to encounters with the ‘spiritual but non-religious’ or assorted philosophical positions rather than anti-religious, irreligious, or aggressive atheist interlocutors.

Keogh’s appeal is nevertheless clear to theologians who retain the respective demeanours and expertise to engage with New Atheists and to refine theology by interacting with them. New Atheists are worth learning from and their claims thoughtfully considered as well as rebutted.