

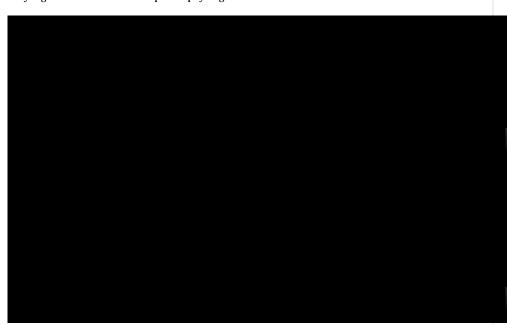


A. C. GRAYLING

It's cheeky, audacious, almost scandalous in a

way. The Bible as we know it today comes in hundreds of different versions (thousands if you count various translations of sections like The Book Of Job and Psalms, which are very popular on their own as literature). It draws upon millennia of oral tradition, written texts, parables, sayings, prayers, psalms, histories and biography, adjudicated at various times by early Catholic Church leaders and other Christian faiths, controversially translated into English (a heresy punishable by death at one point) and then gloriously translated into English for the King James Version in 1611 after some seven years of work. That version was completed by dozens of scholars, surely making it the greatest work of literature ever produced by committee. Some faiths teach that a particular version of the Bible is the literal word of God, but whatever your faith (or lack of it), the Bible in its many forms contains words that can and do inspire and comfort.

Grayling, an atheist, said, hey, that's a clever idea. Why not create a new Bible to instruct and inspire that draws upon many other philosophical sources? You can of course be a humanist and a Christian, but it's tempting to call this "a Bible for the rest of us." He's modeled *The Good Book* on the Bible, with various sections like Genesis, Wisdom, Parables and so on. The text comes from thousands of sources written by hundreds of the world's greatest thinkers: Aristotle, Bacon, Chaucer, Confucius, Darwin, Euripides, Goethe, Hafiz, Jefferson, Laozi, Locke, Montaigne, Ovid, Rimbaud, Rumi, Spinoza, Swift, Voltaire and Walpole are among the many greats he draws upon. Here's a brief chat unrelated to this book in which Grayling talks about his life and philosophy in general.



Even the layout is similar: short chapters, with two columns on each page and lines written in verse but with an eye to poetry. You could of course read it cover to cover, but it's probably best approached by dipping in here and there, as I've done. (I haven't read the entire work yet.) If you're grieving, you might turn to Lamentations or Consolations, which ends with "This is the final consolation: that we will sleep at evening, and be free for ever." (Okay, not so consoling at first blush.)



Striking Distance Of Obama





Shelterpop: Unplugging Appliances: Do I REALLY Have to Do This?





Popeater: Brad and Angelina's Strict Nanny Requirements

If Like 41K



What To Do About Smelly

If Like 670



Noam Chomsky Is the World Too Big to Fail? The Contours of Global Order

Like 3K



AOL Real Estate: Prince William and Kate to Live in Royal Mansion

Like 56



TV Squad: Maria Menounos Relives Her Paparazzi 'Wardrobe Malfunction' on 'Lopez' (VIDEO)

Like 52

DON'T MISS HUFFPOST BLOGGERS





Sam Waterston
Saving Easter Island's Marine
Ecosystems



David O. Russell FDR Said it All in 1936 -- Who Will Follow in His Steps Today?

MOST DISCUSSED RIGHT NOW

1 of 2



Which Countries Speak The Best English? (PHOTOS)



Troubled 'Three Cups Of Tea' Author Hospitalized

If you want to consider friendship, read Concord. If you are looking for pearls of wisdom, meditate on Sage, in which you'll read, "Do not be concerned about others not appreciating you. Be concerned about not appreciating others."

Grayling doesn't just quote these thinkers; this is not a commonplace book where he lists a string of famous quotations. As you can gather from the brief passages I've quoted, Grayling has edited and shaped and woven together ideas and phrases and insights into one voice, delivered in a slightly archaic, formal style. Histories and Acts are two of the longest sections, often drawing on ancient stories from Greece and Rome and the like. Proverbs is easy to plumb. You'd never read this useful saying in the KJV: "A maid that laughs is half taken." But anyone can benefit from remembering "Whispered advice is not worth a pea" or "A true man hates no one."

Grayling does himself no favors with his foreword, here called an Epistle, which is written in such a grand, high-flown style and with such immodest ambition ("its aspiration and aim the good for humanity and the good of the world") that a casual reader might even call it a sin of pride. (Ha!) His Genesis is also a bit stiff. Dive into the middle of the book and you'll probably be drawn in. Start at the beginning and you might feel blocked, just like people who decide they're going to read the Bible and are suddenly deluged with wearisome "begats." And I do wish he'd offered at least a select bibliography of the works he has culled his text from, rather than just a list of names. Footnotes would have been distracting (and not in keeping with the authoritative tone it sought) but still. Perhaps Grayling or someone else will do the detailing of exactly what came from where online.

It will be fascinating to see if The Good Book catches on. Maybe agnostics and atheists will embrace it; maybe Christians will embrace it too as a valuable collection of insights. It might begin as a curiosity and then flourish or remain a cult favorite or just a curiosity. I suppose some might be offended by The Good Book but they needn't be. You don't have to be a nonbeliever to find solace and wisdom in the distilled ideas presented here. It's a testament to the enduring power of the Bible that Grayling sought to draw upon its very form and structure.

Even if you accept any of the four versions of the Ten Commandments that Moses offered up as law, is there harm in asking, as Grayling does in the final section The Good, "Shall we ask, by what commandments shall we live? Or might we better ask, each of ourselves: What kind of person should I be? The first question assumes that there is one right answer. The second assumes that there are many right answers." And yes, Grayling does come up with his own Ten Commandments, not that he would call them such. Would any person of faith object to them?

"Love well, seek the good in all things, harm no others, think for yourself, take responsibility, respect nature, do your utmost, be informed, be kind, be courageous: at least, sincerely try."

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the co-host of Showbiz Sandbox, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his website and his daily blog. Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called Popsurfing and also available for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

NOTE: Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of books to consider for review. He typically does not guarantee coverage and invariably receives far more books than he can cover.

Follow Michael Giltz on Twitter: www.twitter.com/michaelgiltz

Related News On Huffington Post:



Narrative Magazine Friday Feature: 'A. Roolette? A. Roolette?' By Adam

Narrative Magazine: Adam Prince's story "A. Roolette? A. Roolette?" is set during a fiftieth high school reunion, where attending members of the South Pasadena High...

More in Books...









f HOT ON FACEBOOK

1 of 2 ▶



Awkward Wedding Photos: Who Knew That Tying The Knot Could Be This Hilarious?

If Like 412K



7 Overrated Things That Are Actually Pretty Good (But Still Overrated) (PHOTOS)

Like 48

HOT ON TWITTER POWERED BY

1 of 2 ▶



mayhemstudios

RT @sbeasla: What happens when you tickle a little penguin? http://j.mp/dEZjCM via @huffingtonpost



twsuccess Antoine Dodson Arrested For Marijuana Possession http://huff.to/edLalo

HUFFPOST'S BIG NEWS PAGES







Afghanistan









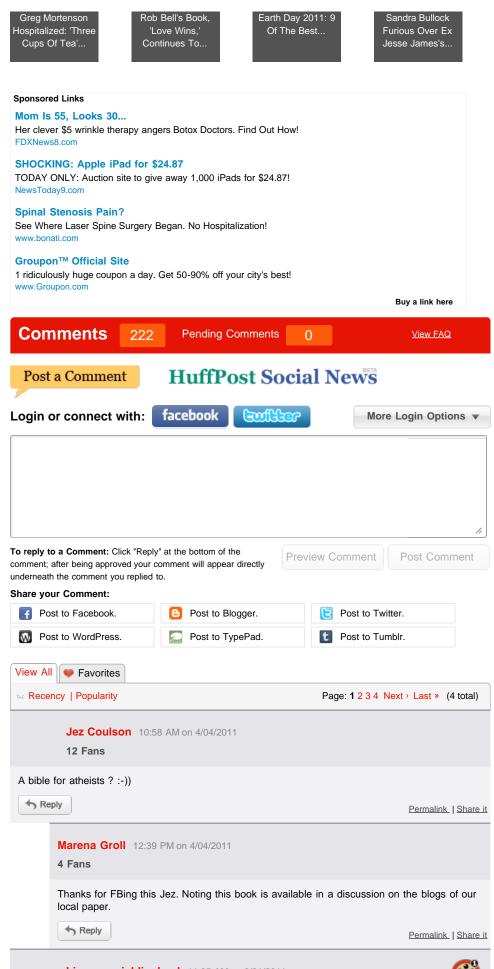
Brian Williams





Gabrielle

MORE BIG NEWS PAGES »





"The text comes from thousands of sources written by hundreds of the world's greatest thinkers: Aristotle, Bacon, Chaucer, Confucius, Darwin, Euripides, Goethe, Hafiz, Jefferson, Laozi, Locke, Montaigne, Ovid, Rimbaud, Rumi, Spinoza, Swift, Voltaire and Walpole are among the many greats he draws upon."

Reminds me of an editorial cartoon a few years ago, depicting a bookstore whose shelves were lined with books written by men, in which a man was busily complaining to a woman clerk, asking how come there were so many woman authored books in the (one meager shelf of women's studies) store, where were the books written by men?

So, not having read the entire list of sources, which I assume to be incomplete, I'm taking a chance here of appearing super foolish, by asking 'where are the opinions of the world's greatest thinking women in this?' Are there any at all?



Permalink | Share it

HUFFPOST SUPER USER

Peace Walker 09:59 PM on 3/31/2011

421 Fans E Follow





Fanned and Faved! I argued earlier about the lack of non-European authors, but when I looked into the book itself they were in fact included. The article author has since added Lao Zi and Rumi to the list to prove that it includes world names.

I am very glad that you brought up the gender issue as well. We will see who comments on that!



Permalink | Share it

HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 12:43 AM on 4/01/2011 78 Fans



The only woman I can spot on the list is Sappho, I'm afraid. It does also include folklore and folktales, many of which would have been handed down by women in oral traditions. But I'm stretching the point. He is lacking in women. The vast majority of thinkers are hundreds or thousands of years old. Which women should he have drawn upon? Who would you put on his reading list?



Permalink | Share it

There are More Comments on this Thread. Click Here To See them All

fightandorflight 03:50 PM on 3/30/2011

74 Fans

"It might begin as a curiosity and then flourish or remain a cult favorite or just a curiosity"

the latter is most probable, seems snarky at first impression



Permalink | Share it

HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 12:16 AM on 3/31/2011

78 Fans



Snarky? I'm not sure what I wrote or quoted from the book that gave that impression, but nothing could be further from the truth. Snarky about what? It's a book that presents the author's selection of distilled wisdom from millennia of writings and sayings and folklore and the like about friendship, grieving, ethics, morality and love. Snarky is surely the one thing it isn't, however successful or not one considers the book to be.



Permalink | Share it



107 Fans

"Love well, seek the good in all things, harm no others, think for yourself, take responsibility, respect nature, do your utmost, be informed, be kind, be courageous: at least, sincerely try."

Now, THAT'S the best ten commandements ever! Thanks.

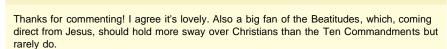


Permalink | Share it

HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 12:17 AM on 3/31/2011

78 Fans





Permalink | Share it

Eric4969 02:41 PM on 3/30/2011

213 Fans



What ever it Takes to get the Uneducated to Stop believing in Man MAde Stories, religion the biggest Hoax Man Kind has ever been told and believed for thousands of years.. I understand people 100 years ago and all before them, they thought the world was flat and the center of everything LOL BUT in todays World with SCIENCE PROVING with out a DOUGHT all those stories are MAN MADE and people still believing they are the Word of the AlMighty is just (NICE WORD) Anyways the Sooner we GROW UP as a society the better..



Permalink | Share it

applecrispbetty 11:24 AM on 4/01/2011

2 Fans

I like your 1600's to 1700's writing style of capitalizing every other word. We lost something when that style of writing became passe.



Permalink | Share it

Syllogizer 01:17 PM on 3/30/2011

92 Fans



When I saw the title of this article, I thought, "now this is bizarre". And now having read the article, I see it is even more bizarre than I expected!

Of course, it is simply not possible for any one person to make a Bible-style book. Even the attempt to do this shows a total failure to understand what it is that makes this book so special.

But there is one part where the article almost got it right. The book will enjoy a brief spell of popularity, as clueless atheistic humanists embrace it hoping to find it something they can use to thump back at the Bible-thumpers. But once they figure out this approach accomplishes nothing, the book's popularity will fade, just like Bennett's "Book of Virtues".



Permalink | Share it

Angry Dad 10:07 PM on 3/30/2011

17 Fans

I always find it interesting that people with the strongest faith in their "true" religion are so easily threatened by outside ideas. Explore our shared humanity and the wisdom of people who actually existed and did some serious intellectual work on who, what and why we are.



Permalink | Share it

HUFFPOST BLOGGER
Michael Giltz 12:23 AM on 3/31/2011
78 Fans



I must emphasize the book is not a rejoinder to faith nor does it comment on faith or religion or whether someone should or should not practice a religion. It's his collection of insights and wisdom that he has cherished and many have found enduring and worth reading for centuries now, hence the status of Aristotle and Locke and Jefferson and so many others from the East and the West. If the book were half as commercially successful as Bennett's Book Of Virtues (which was a major bestseller and spawned a sequel for kids and even a tv series), I'm sure Grayling and the publisher would be thrilled.



Permalink | Share it

hippynanainblingland 11:13 AM on 3/31/2011

107 Fans



Michael: Do we get to hear our mothers' voices through the ages, as well as our fathers'?



Permalink | Share it

conscioushope 01:08 PM on 3/30/2011

1274 Fans



As a "Christian humanist" this actually sounds really exciting to me. Don't want to spend \$35. on it yet....but maybe some day!



Permalink | Share it

HUFFPOST SUPER USER

Peace Walker 12:38 PM on 3/30/2011

421 Fans E Follow





I would have sooner chosen "books" based upon the themes created by Khalil Gabran in The Prophet.



Permalink | Share it

HUFFPOST SUPER USER

Peace Walker 12:36 PM on 3/30/2011

421 Fans E Follow





Here is the piece that the author of the article was missing; this gives me a much greater appreciate for the scope of the work, and the inclusion of non-European thinkers...

"Instead, going back to traditions older than Christianity, and far richer and more various, including the non-theistic philosophical and literary schools of the great civilisations of both West and East, from the Greek philosophy of classical antiquity and its contemporaneous Confucian, Mencian and Mohist schools in China, down through classical Rome, the flourishing of Indian and Arab worlds, the European Renaissance and Enlightenment, the worldwide scientific discoveries of the 19th and 20th centuries to the present, Grayling collects, edits, rearranges and organises the collective secular wisdom of the world in one highly readable volume. Contents of this title include: "Genesis"; "Proverbs"; "Histories"; "Songs"; "Wisdom Acts"; "The Lawgiver Lamentations"; "Concord Consolations"; "Sages"; and, "The Good Parables".



Permalink | Share it

Hexxenhammer 11:20 AM on 3/30/2011

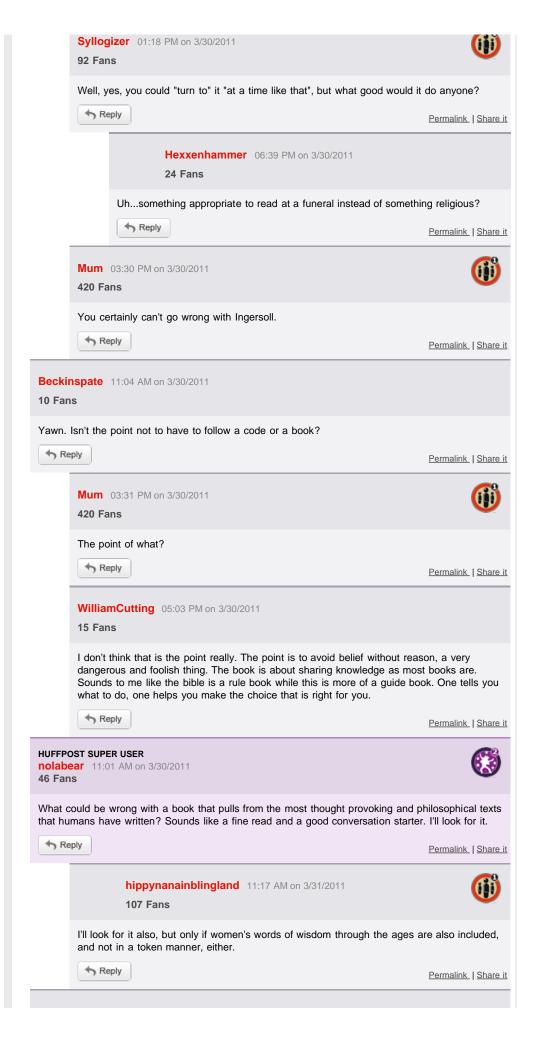
24 Fans

I don't think this is that bad. I've been talking with my mom about end of life planning. We talked about my atheist uncle, who is in his late 70s. He doesn't think a life should pass without a ceremony of some sort, but obviously he doesn't want a pastor performing the ceremony, or a religious funeral in any way. Having a book with humanist quotes or wisdom would be a thing you could turn to at a time like that. All I could think of before was to read a Robert Ingersoll essay or something, which is still a good idea.



Permalink | Share it





practiceempathy 10:50 AM on 3/30/2011

113 Fans

"Love well, seek the good in all things, harm no others, think for yourself, take responsibility, respect nature, do your utmost, be informed, be kind, be courageous: at least, sincerely try."

This is exactly my moral code.

So, it really baffles and angers me whenever a Christian condemns me as un unrepentent sinner doomed to suffer in eternal fire. Really? REALLY?

A god who would do that to someone who made a conscious, persistent effort to do good in this life doesn't deserve my fear of eternal suffering, so I'm unafraid.



Permalink | Share it

conscioushope 01:10 PM on 3/30/2011

1274 Fans



Beautiful "moral code", practice!

I am a seeking "Christian humanist" who is not satisfied with the status quo. I love your thinking. And, wherever you go in this life or beyond, I hope to meet you there! ;)



Permalink | Share it

practiceempathy 01:17 PM on 3/30/2011

113 Fans

"conscioushope," that was very nice to read. Thank you.

Right back at you!



Permalink | Share it

lastpost 09:45 AM on 3/30/2011

148 Fans



"The Good Book: A Humanist Bible"

The Tome of Thought: An Agonistic's Anthology, surely. As an atheist might be challenged to produce irrefutable evidence, in order to substantiate what would otherwise also be belief.

"Do not be concerned about others not appreciating you". Its probably due to something you don't appreciate.

"This is the final consolation: that we will sleep at evening, and be free for ever." (Okay, not so consoling at first blush.)

The final consolation: if we sleep at evening, and are free for ever. We are unlikely to be conscious of that state.

"Love well, seek the good in all things, harm no others, think for yourself, take responsibility, respect nature, do your utmost, be informed, be kind, be courageous: at least, sincerely try" to remember, it might be you who's mistaken.



Permalink | Share it

edgraham 09:41 AM on 3/30/2011

34 Fans

It may well be a "Good Book" but, I think this book will advance the religious argument that atheism is also a religion.

I will not be attending the achurch.

It must be really hard to sell a book that tell people how to be good.

