

A Christian
Response and Reaction
to Philip Pullman's
“His Dark Materials” Series
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EXTENDED SUMMARY RESPONSE

Brief Summary of a Christian Response to Pullman's "His Dark Materials" and the upcoming release of book one, "The Golden Compass."

Philip Pullman's "His Dark Materials" series is a direct answer to another Oxford writer's work, CS Lewis's "The Chronicles of Narnia." Though it contains many elements that many Christians will instinctively detect as paganism, in fact Pullman is advancing a distinctly atheistic worldview. In that worldview, naturalistic theories can account for anything that is true within Christianity or in paganism. Godless evolutionary processes manifesting in different ways in unlimited universes under the many-universe hypothesis make it possible to entertain the strongest arguments for the supernatural and remain an atheist because they are reframed in naturalistic terms. No transcendental God needed.

This is what makes the Pullman series a dangerous rival to Christianity. Unlike the Harry Potter series where it is understood to be a work of fiction that does not correlate to reality- understood by the author of that series and virtually every reader- the Pullman series advances the notion that his world may actually be the real world. In fact, given his primary literary constructs, the multiverse and diverse evolutionary outcomes, it might be argued that even though his work is fictional, it may actually be real. It can't be excluded.

Another distinguishing factor between HDM and Harry Potter is that when students go off to college, they are not taught that any of the foundational principles underneath Harry Potter are actually supported by modern science. In HDM, by contrast, evolutionary theory is the prevailing doctrine and students will have been taught it in most cases already in high school, and exposed to it in their dinosaur books in kindergarten. The 'many worlds' hypothesis (which for brevity's sake I will call the 'multiverse'), which strikes even many atheists as fantastic and ludicrous, is in fact a prevailing scientific concept among quantum physicists today, which our inquiring college students will soon discover. In other words, the conceptual framework underneath Pullman's stories is in fact an extension of what students are actually learning in school and university.

In fact, given the multiverse and evolutionary processes which is the framework of Pullman's books, one could say that the events and realities described in Pullman's universe actually do exist somewhere in some real set of universes, since, after all, you have an unlimited amount of universes to work with and unlimited room for evolution to take unlimited paths. Not that Pullman would argue that, but technically, it is probably true.

It is no comfort that even atheists find the multiverse to be a straining of rationality, because when the chips are down they are more than happy to embrace it in their arguments. For example, the 'fine tuning' argument that the universe bears marks of intentional architecture and design is often countered by the fact that if you have an

unlimited amount of universes to work with, it is inevitable that eventually one of them will look like ours and produce people like us to think about it. Never mind the fact that there is no actual evidence of these other universes apart from mathematical modeling and calculation.

It would seem from such arbitrary argumentation that insists on evidence to defeat one line of reasoning by theists but abandons a need for evidence in order to defeat another line of reasoning that atheism and skepticism is completely, and utterly rationally bankrupt. I can see the argument. But the true underlying principle is this: Any naturalistic explanation is preferred to any supernaturalistic explanation, period.

So, when the chips are down, atheists will be more than happy to invoke the possibility of there being many universes since as obnoxious as that hypothesis is, it is at least preferable to the conclusion that there is a God.

Though it is not given explicit voice in Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, this is in fact the basic underlying attitude of the series and much modern philosophical naturalism. By being willing to throw the philosophical equivalent of the kitchen sink at all arguments and evidences usually brought to bear as supporting Christian theism, the series aims to show that naturalism can give plausible answers to all of them: and the science they learn in their college classes substantiates the plausibility of those answers.

HERE THE RESPONSE BEGINS

Having finally concluded my reading of the Pullman *His Dark Materials* (HDM) series, I find that I have so much to say that if I said it all it would take hours upon hours to do so. I had been 'warned' about HDM many years back but had never taken an interest until I heard there was going to be a movie. HDM is more successful in Britain than in America, but a movie can change that in an instant because of the way the American mind works.

HIS DARK MATERIALS VERSUS HARRY POTTER

My first thought as I coursed through the books is that I was right in saying that the Harry Potter series is a squirt gun compared to the threat that HDM poses to the Christian world view. Notwithstanding Rowling's attempt to torpedo even the Christians that have supported her and her series, I stand by my assertion that if Harry Potter is a threat to young Christians then the Christian educators should be fired and a whole new look given to how we bring up youth in the faith. If Harry Potter is a threat to young non-Christians, bringing them closer to paganism, I still mark that as being better than the other alternative, which as it happens is captured by Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy and Pullman's missionary-like secular atheism.

The difference between the HP series and the HDM series is simple: In Harry Potter, everyone understands that it is a fantasy world and Rowling does not seriously offer to readers the argument that she's describing our world, whereas with HDM, Pullman is laying out a system by which we could conclude that his world is a real possible reality. In fact, one could believe, given that system, that somewhere his world actually is reality.

RELIGION REINTERPRETED IN NATURALISTIC TERMS

Pullman's whole point is to martial 'science' and secular philosophy in our world to show that it can account even for all of the claims of Christianity. For example, he allows the 'soul' but it is just another form of matter. There are angels, but they too are just material agents, though often much weaker than literally corporeal agents, like humans. And there is a God- the 'ancient of days' is an old, old, entity, not God as Christians understand him but how many people will know that- who is just the first among the angels whom are nothing more than manifestations of matter that has become conscious. A running theme in the books is to hunt down and kill 'God.'

To begin to understand how a secular atheist could deny that there is a God but still have him as a creature in his books that can be killed, I should briefly speak to the many worlds hypothesis, or what I shall simply call the 'multiverse.' The multiverse is derived from quantum science. Years back, quantum physicists understood that given the results of their experiments, one could not say that something existed unless it was observed. This was an unexpected result. Naturally, philosophical questions quickly emerge. For example, if it was true that reality seemed to be connected to an observer, who observes the observer? Christians readily see that this sort of dilemma is nothing new and reduces to other arguments where there is a final regress... A First Cause, a First Mover, a First Observer.

However, as our scientists were keen to keep 'God' off the table as an explanation, this clean inference was not even considered. And that is worth saying, because that means that Pullman's whole system depends on excluding God as an explanation from first principles, by definition. Instead, the scientists set about trying to find a naturalistic solution, and you'll have to decide if they did any better. For, beginning with a gent by the name of Wheeler, they posited that to account for such issues, for every observation there was a whole universe. In one universe, your coffee mug when dropped, breaks, and in another, it remains intact. There are as many universes as there are possible diverging observations.

Apparently, this makes more sense than positing a single Observer attending just to our own creation.

With this in mind, though, you can begin to see how Pullman can begin appropriating Christian claims and giving naturalistic spin that is more palatable to the philosophical naturalist. In our universe (which emerges in book 2), things are as we understand them. But in other universes, evolution has produced different things, and the 'spirit' world shows itself more how they really are: just mere natural entities.

THE ATHEIST'S CONCEPTION OF GOD IS A STRAWMAN

Essentially, Pullman makes the same mistake that Dawkins makes. The Christian God is a transcendent entity and also immanent. That means that God is external to our reality but sustains it all by his own word. (John 1, Heb 1, Eph 4:6, etc). God is not in the same category as Zeus, or Baal, etc, or other gods that are entities, etc.

At times, it seems as though Pullman himself senses the disconnect, and has his characters indicating that it was still an open question as to whether or not there is a Creator. However, such a nuance is forgotten near the end of "The Amber Spyglass" when the 'tempter,' Mary Malone, says, "The Christian religion is a very powerful and convincing mistake, that's all." (The Amber Spyglass, pg 441)

So, it is fair to suppose that the 'God' in the pages that follow is meant to be 'God' as the Christians understand him, but the 'God' that is found and then 'dies' is nothing more than an angel masquerading as good when in fact this being- the 'Authority' is just a wicked and brutal entity (though at this point, senile). In fact, the rebellious angels are 'good.'

One would like to set aside with a proper amount of derision the hordes of atheists out there that are apparently well educated but obnoxiously clueless about the nature of the thing that they are denouncing and denying, but this seems to be a pervasive problem. So pervasive, in fact, that I almost can't even blame the atheists. I think we will find that atheists have Sunday School notions of God because the Christian church rarely gives people anything more than a Sunday School education. Almost.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IS THE ONLY CHURCH PULLMAN KNOWS.

By labeling 'God' as 'the Authority' it is clear just what Pullman's issue is with Christianity. If there were any doubt, his juxtaposition of the 'Kingdom of Heaven' with the 'Republic of Heaven' makes it clear enough. As so many atheists do, the primary conception of the Christian church is the Roman Catholic Church. You see the same attitude in Bertrand Russell's "Why I am not a Christian." The abuses of the RCC are the singular measure of the Christian religion. Pullman only hints at the existence of a half billion protestants when asserting that Calvin had little children killed.

This myopic perspective misses all of the important points. As a protestant myself, I certainly have my problems with the RCC, but I don't have any trouble seeing that Institutions are dangerous no matter who is in charge. Over three hundred years not much more than 2 million people died in the Crusades, but under Lenin, Stalin, Mao, etc, in, say 20 years, some 100 million died. This is the part where atheists begin jumping up and down and hollering that the problem was wicked men, not the atheistic world view: very well, I submit the same for the abuses of the RCC church. That means that Christianity can be- if we wanted to be fair and reasonable and at least pretend to be objective- evaluated apart from the abuses of its adherents, even if those adherents have plenty of black marks to reconcile.

PULLMAN'S REAL PROBLEM: AUTHORITY

There is a great flaw in trying to feign any hope to establish a 'Republic of Heaven' as opposed to a 'Kingdom' and the Pullman series wallows in it without even noticing. Namely, in the 'Republic of Heaven' where people have freedom and the right to do as they please and learn, by golly, learn! what do we actually see? Lord Asriel and his friends are in charge and in control. It is not a Republic, it is an oligarchy, it is *Lord Asriel's Kingdom*.

Ostensibly, the difference is that the people who rally to the RoH under Lord Asriel do so out of free choice and not because they are coerced to do so by that damned 'Authority.' However, though never mentioned in the HDM series, there are people who submit themselves to God willingly in response to his grace. Romans 12:1-2 lays out the ideal response fairly clearly:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices- holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship.

The submission happens as a response to God's mercy, not coercion. Even though there appears to be no one in the Pullman series, inside or outside of the RCC, that actually wants to serve God, in this universe I've met a fair bunch. The underlying criticism is ironic given how many times atheists have argued with me that an omnipotent God could make them believe, and should; in the Pullman series that's just the kind of thing he doesn't like.

BY SIN THE ATHEISTIC PULLMAN ONLY THINKS 'SEX'

As is often the case, one of the central things that Pullman doesn't like the 'Authority' pulling rank on is sexuality. There are plenty of veiled allusions to this, and the series ends more or less with two of the main characters in a grove of trees... kissing is all it says, but whatever happens in there resolves the entire crisis facing their section of the multiverse, so it is safe to assume they went 'all the way.'

Here we see the anti-RCC undertone make itself plain. The whole reason why the Tempter "Mary Malone" decides there is no God is because of a flush of emotions she feels towards a man, even though she is a nun. The extended quote:

" [Someone gave me a piece of marzipan reminding me of a kiss I had when I was 12] and it all came back. And I thought: am I really going to spend the rest of my life without ever feeling that again? I thought: I *want* to go to China [China=an innuendo referring to sex, presumably]. It's full of treasures and strangeness and mystery and joy, I thought, Will anyone be better off if I go straight back to the hotel and say my prayers and confess to the priest and promise never to fall into temptation again? Will anyone be the better for making me miserable?

And the answer came back- no. No one will. There's no one to fret, no one to condemn, no one to bless me for being a good girl, no one to punish me for being wicked. Heaven was empty. I didn't know whether God had died, or whether there never had been a God at all. Either way I felt free and lonely and I didn't know whether I was happy or unhappy, but something very strange had happened. And all that huge change came about as I had the marzipan in my mouth, before I'd even swallowed it. A taste- a memory- a landslide...

When I did swallow it and looked at the man across the table, I could tell he knew something had happened. I couldn't tell him there and then; it was still too strange and private almost for me. But later on we went for a walk along the beach in the dark, and the warm night breeze kept stirring my hair about, and the Atlantic was being very well-behaved- little quiet waves around our feet..."

"And I took the crucifix from around my neck and I threw it in the sea. That was it. All over. Gone."

"So, that was how I stopped being a nun," she said. (TAS, Chapter 33, pg 445)

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, SEX, AND FAIRLY CONSIDERING CHRISTIANITY

I have heard many arguments for atheism, but this one really takes the cake. I have little doubt that something like this was what Martin Luther experienced, but he stopped being a monk, not being a Christian. How does one get from guilt associated with a forbidden pleasure- forbidden because of one's own vows, not because of one's nature- to the argument... the 'answer that came back' that there was no God?

If Pullman wasn't aware of the Scriptures on this point, at least Luther was:

Now to the unmarried and to the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion." (1 Cor 7:8-9)

Sure, there is an acknowledgment here that there is good reason for remaining unmarried, but it is not considered a sin to have that passion, nor even to burn, nor to let the fire rage. In fact, contrary to the Tempter/Mary Malone, the argument being made seems to be the complete opposite, that to not marry- to not enter into the marital embrace- in this circumstance would be sin.

Or, another passage:

"the Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God

created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer." (1 Tim 4:1-5)

How is it that Mary Malone, a nun, was unaware of these passages? Here we see, in connection too with some of the subtle innuendos that came earlier, that Pullman's caricature vision of the Christian religion is derived from the RCC's handling of sexuality within the ecclesiastical ranks. Now, in my experience thus far in my young life, the only people I've come across who think it is a good thing for men and women to be unmarried if they are to be nuns, monks, and priests, are the Catholics themselves. Most of us think it is a very bad idea to ask any but the truly gifted in celibacy to remain celibate and that certain consequences inevitably follow. The fact that the RCC doesn't come across well on this point to skeptics or to Protestants does not boil down to some nuanced reading of the Scriptures. The passages above make it clear that marriage/sex is permitted and not begrudgingly. Sex is a gift we are meant to enjoy- for everything God created is good- and God created sex.

What we see in the HDM series is a trend spotted many years ago already by CS Lewis and Dorothy Sayers. HDM is really uncomfortable with notions of 'original sin' and though it occasionally casts 'original sin' as being committed by disobeying the churchly authorities, as the passage from Mary Malone illustrates, the thing that secularists really think of when they think of sin, 'original' and otherwise, is just sex. A quote from Dorothy Sayers is appropriate:

Perhaps the bitterest commentary on the way in which Christian doctrine has been taught in the last few centuries is the fact that to the majority of people the word *immorality* has come to mean one thing and one thing only. By a hideous irony, our shrinking reprobation of that sin has made us too delicate so much as to name it, so that we have come to use for it the words that were made to cover the whole range of human corruption. A man may be greedy and selfish; spiteful, cruel, jealous, and unjust; violent and brutal; grasping unscrupulous, and a liar; stubborn and arrogant; stupid, morose, and dead to every noble instinct- and still we are ready to say of him that he is not an immoral man. I am reminded of a young man who once said to me with perfect simplicity: "I did not know there were seven deadly sins; please tell me the names of the other six." ("The Other Six Deadly Sin," Sayers, *The Whimsical Christian*)

Note here that the blame is being put on the shoulders of Christian education, where I believe, is a good place to put it. I recommend her essay to anyone, and as I said, CS Lewis made similar observations.

Sexual expression is a part of the created order and endorsed as a gift from God. We Christians should do a much better job of casting sexuality in positive terms rather than knee-jerking and moralizing and holding people to a standard that they themselves don't operate under. By all means, hold those to the standard who say they abide by the

standard, but for the nonChristians the effect is clear: they really believe that God is out to dash their fun, and they aren't educated enough to see through the excesses and extremes in Christian history to sort out what is being rightly said and what is not supported by the Christian scriptures. I have a great deal more to say about that, but for now I'll have to... abstain.

TWO FATAL FLAWS

On a more deeper level, Pullman finally produces something that passes as substance when discussing 'good and evil.' You see, up to this point in the series, it has been assumed that the abuses of the Church, in all the universes that contained one, were bad and evil. For this reason, Lord Asriel and his minions were right and justified to try to overthrow the kingdom of Heaven and establish a Republic of Heaven. But this exposes two fatal flaws that Pullman doesn't even bother to address.

THE FIRST FATAL FLAW: PULLMAN'S WORLDVIEW IS EVOLUTIONARY BUT HIS MORALITY ISN'T

1. Despite the fact that the many worlds hypothesis would allow for virtually any configuration we might imagine- for example, a universe where there was a real Adam and Eve and a real flood and a real 'young earth'- the story assumes that these are 'make-like,' or metaphors. The truth, of course, in all of the universes every creature is the product of evolution.

Now, if we are to presume that we all arose via evolutionary processes, it would stand to reason that our moral code would be the code of the jungle: survival of the fittest, dog eat dog, have more babies than the other species and members of your own species. That makes sense, but it is exactly that kind of oppressive behavior that Pullman eviscerates as seen in the Church. But how could it be 'bad' or 'oppressive'? In evolutionary terms, it would actually be 'good.'

The answer to this by atheists is always the same. First they pound on their chests and insist that they are as moral as anyone else. This is wonderfully ironic given that most Christians would insist that that is not saying much, as all have fallen short of the Glory of God. Then they insist that they don't in the slightest believe that evolution should predict such mercenary and brutal behavior as being 'good.' No, they don't, but that is not a point in their favor. That exposes them as being irrational.

One does not go out and kill the lion for hunting and killing the gazelle on the grounds that the lion is evil. The lion is doing what evolution has prepared it to do, and if you watch the Discovery Channel you'll hear about how marvelously evolution has 'designed' the lion to do what it does and the gazelle to do what it does. So at what point does it become 'good' to brutally kill something? When it is your own species? Lions kill lions. Spider wives eat their hubbies. Would it be because.... we are conscious? What does that have to do with anything?

It is my contention that the atheist's disgust with the argument that if we are evolved, we ought to have the morality of the jungle is evidence in fact that they concede in practice there really is an objective morality, and they have a hint of it, and its source.

THE SECOND FATAL FLAW: PULLMAN SUBTLY EMPLOYS THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA AGAINST CHRISTIAN THEISM ONLY TO REINSTATE IT AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

2. In Pullman's series, we see essentially a dystheism (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misotheism>) being explored. This is the idea, basically, that 'God' may exist but might in fact be evil. But how does one decide that something is good, or evil, in order to blame God, especially if morality is relative, as most atheists will assert?

In clear, succinct language, we hear the final analysis, again in conversation with the 'tempter':

"When you stopped believing in God," [Will] went on, "did you stop believing in good and evil?"

"No. But I stopped believing there was a power of good and a power of evil that were outside of us. And I came to believe that good and evil are names for what people do, not for what they are. All we can say is that this is a good deed, because it helps someone, or that's an evil one, because it hurts them. People are too complicated to have simple labels." (The Amber Spyglass, pg 447)

Where do we find a justification for this analysis? And how is it not good if I wipe out my competitors? You see, what is fascinating here is that in Pullman's rush to pull down the Authority as a full and final source on what is good and evil- a perplexing mystery, no doubt- Pullman makes each person their own 'final authority.' There is no escape from 'authority.' You must choose an authority, whether it be yourself or some higher entity.

What is at issue here is the so-called Euthyphro dilemma (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euthyphro_dilemma) which, quoting from the wiki article, is basically, "Is what is moral/good commanded by God because it is moral, or is it moral/good because it is commanded by God?"

Now, in my mind, the assertion of the Pullman series that the Kingdom of Heaven is essentially a wicked, evil, and oppressive regime assumes that such oppression is morally bad. But if there is no God, the Euthyphro dilemma does not go away, it just shifts to the individual person. The question then becomes, "Is what is good as understood by Pullman good because it good, or is it good because Pullman has decided it was good?"

As challenging as this philosophical issue is, I think it makes much more sense to believe that morality does not reduce to any and all of our 6 billion humans on the planet, all of

which allegedly are the product of evolution. It makes much more sense to regress the issue to a single creator of us all, where it is still challenging, but more properly placed.

As it is, we are right to wonder if Pullman's characterization of the Church and God as evil is evil because Pullman has decided it to be so. If that is the case, we are all welcome to set aside his views in favor of our own, and so *by his own logic*, we can decry the abuses of the Church but find it to nonetheless be the vanguard of many things we personally consider to be good. In other words, if Pullman challenges the morality of God, we shouldn't even care, because his logic would allow our ideas on morality to be equally valid as his.

On the other hand, if it is in fact the case that what Pullman decries in the Church is something we can all decry, then that admits that there is a final, objective moral reality. The whole persuasiveness of the argument of his series in fact depends on our shared view that inquisitions are bad and wicked. That we would have shared views on what is bad or wicked, or that it is 'good' to help someone and 'bad' to hurt them, is in fact an argument that there is an objective morality, and if there is an objective morality, that is an argument for the existence of a Good God, however perplexing we might find the Euthyphro Dilemma.

A THIRD FATAL FLAW? FAILURE TO INCORPORATE THE INCARNATION: THE CHRISTIAN GOD IS NOT INDIFFERENT TO SUFFERING

We might argue that there is yet a third fatal flaw.

By invoking the multiverse, Pullman opens up the possibility that even if the universes he has described exist, there could be a universe that exists that is just the way Christians understand it, where God is a transcendent entity and the creation and fall accounts and the flood really happened, and God eventually became incarnate in order to rescue humans. Apart from the fact that if we are already prepared to come this far we may as well simply posit one God with one known universe, if we continue with his reasoning such a universe really does exist, and we may as well conclude that we are in it, because it exists *somewhere*.

One of the fascinating omissions of the Pullman series is that except for a brief mention here and there, Jesus rarely is mentioned. If the HDM series aims to re-interpret even supernaturalistic phenomena in naturalistic terms, appropriating this religious claim and that religious claim, it would stand to reason that he would have had an answer for the incarnation of God. But this is completely absent.

I'm not sure why that is without asking him, but it does raise the important question as to just how knowledgeable this Oxford trained professor really is about Christianity. For, if you ponder the incarnation of God, the 'word made flesh,' (John 1) you begin to see in numerous places how Pullman's series unravels.

For example, in his series God is a vindictive fellow and ‘original sin’ is just God throwing cold water on humanity’s every attempt to have fun. But the incarnation shows that God really is concerned with the troubles that have fallen up on the earth. The incarnation shows that God is not a disinterested agent seeking only to make us miserable. Jesus said that he came so that we might have life, and life to the fullest.

At the creation, Adam and the Woman were encouraged to be fruitful and multiply. That means sex, and lots of it. Is it so bad that that sex was intended to occur between a single man and a single woman? You may as well complain that you can’t make a left turn on red and then whine when you do it anyway and get clocked by an oncoming truck. But to conclude that the powers that be don’t want you to drive just because there are some ‘rules of the road’? Absurd. That Christianity continued to approve of sexuality is an issue I already discussed, so I’ll move on.

The whole point of the incarnation is that God aimed to defeat death and end suffering and undue pain. How ironic, then, that Pullman has a world of the dead in his series that is allegedly the work of that diabolic Yahweh! If Pullman detests death, he is not the first. If the incarnation really happened, with a death and resurrection to cap it off, it is clear that God himself detests death: the moral territory that Pullman seeks to occupy is already held by God, who really can- and did- do something about it.

Just because God has not dealt with evil in the manner that some atheists wish he would does not mean that he has not dealt with it, and won’t deal with it in time with utmost finality.

Such counteracting themes inspired by a reflection of the incarnation are not even given a hearing in the Pullman series, leading me to wonder if it was easier for Pullman to hate God if he ignored evidence that God truly cared about humanity. But this is also why Pullman’s approach- like many other atheists today- to reinterpret that which we would have previously considered to be ‘supernatural’ is such a philosophical threat, for Pullman is making the contention that even if there is a place of the dead, even if we have a soul, even if there is a way out of death, even if the dead can rise and reunite with their soul, we still shouldn’t consider it rational to believe there is a Good God behind it all.

SIX EXAMPLES OF THINGS IN THE BIBLE ATHEISTS MOCK BUT PULLMAN WILL CONSIDER AS LONG AS THEY HAVE NATURALISTIC EXPLANATIONS

Consider some examples of supernaturalistic phenomena being reinterpreted in naturalistic terms in HDM:

1. One of the areas of contentions between theists and atheists is about the existence of the soul. In HDM, Pullman sidesteps the issue and grants that there may be a ‘soul’ but in fact it is just ‘matter’ in some form, which could actually be seen under the right circumstances, like, say, if you were in a different universe where evolution went differently.

2. Another area of argument sometimes is on whether or not there is a 'world of the dead.' The Bible describes this place as being in the depths of the earth, and though I personally think that is probably figurative language, I wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't. Such a thought is of course ridiculed by atheists, but in HDM there is a world of the dead, after all, and it is just a place in one universe used by the naturalistic god, Yahweh, to store dead people... ghosts, ghosts of course just a different form of matter.
3. Atheists mock the Bible on the grounds that it has things like Balaam's donkey, talking. But in HDM, there can be animals that talk in some universes, and in fact there can be other evolved forms that are sentient. For example, the daemons themselves, or Iorek Byrnison, the great fighting bear.
4. Atheists mock Genesis because it has people living to be of great age, but in HDM the 'witches' of Lyra's world actually do live of great age. Why not? Evolution can do anything and with unlimited amounts of universes for evolution to work with, surely such longevity is inherently absurd, after all.
5. Philosophical materialists would dispute the existence of angels, but in Pullman's world, there are definitely angels, but they again are just forms of matter.
6. There are other examples where Pullman is prepared to allow the Bible to speak the truth, provided you interpret them naturalistically. For example, Yahweh's second in command is Enoch, a very powerful but lusty human, who is exactly the same Enoch as described in Genesis as being pulled up by God. (Page 399 of The Amber Spyglass) In yet another place (page 439, TAS), St. Paul is even cited approvingly, giving the impression that even in the Bible there is support for Pullman's ideas.

This list could go on and on of things that atheists dispute left and right but we see as tolerable and something to consider as possible in the HDM series- provided they have naturalistic explanations, ultimately.

YOU MAY AS WELL BE A CHRISTIAN

Isn't it a simple conclusion that if you're willing to ponder as possible- in some universe elsewhere- everything you dismiss as nonsense in this universe, you should be willing to consider it as possible here? If you're willing to ponder a real Enoch as described in Genesis, why not a real God with a real Adam and Eve, a real fall, a real flood, real miracles, a real incarnation, a real victory over death, just as the Scriptures claim to describe?

This is a classic example of wanting one's cake and eating it, too. If you've come as far as Pullman does, all you've accomplished seemingly is that you've accepted all of the fantastic claims of the Christian Bible but not the nasty regulations on only having sex with one partner who is of the opposite sex, oh, that horrid, horrid regulation.

CONCLUDING STATEMENTS: HOW CHRISTIANS SHOULD RESPOND

Now, one final thing needs to be said. There will be Christians who view the Pullman series as paganism in disguise and make the mistake that paganism is the real threat here. I have spoken at length about the various naturalistic reinterpretations so that readers of this essay will see that even though pagan elements are contained, right alongside Christian ones, Pullman's intent is the same with both: give them naturalistic, atheistic interpretations. I discuss this mistake in this blog article here: <http://sntjohnny.com/front/archives/125>

There is so much more that could be said about the Pullman series, but probably the most important thing I can say is that Christians need to dramatically rethink their entire approach to the world. We need more scientists, more philosophers, more scholars who are informed Christians. When we find a person with spiritual inclinations we direct them to church work, which isn't bad in itself, but then we do not train them for the war that we are in but rather pretend that the front lines are a ways off... and will remain in a distance indefinitely. In fact, the enemy is upon us.

In other words, Christians shouldn't be focused as much on avoiding the challenges that face us but rather confronting them and overcoming them. Boycotting or warning people away from reading this series will probably result in more people reading them, but worse, will give off the impression that we Christians can't compete with the ideas and arguments the book contains. This impression will have significant weight for tens of thousands of Christians who leave the church quietly on a lurking hunch that it is all a pack of lies. It is better to fight. It is better to stand our ground. When we do, that leaves its own impression.

Don't like the militant sound of this ending? Pullman ends his series with the characters vowing to build the Republic of Heaven where ever they are, a continuation of Mary Malone's mission to 'tell true stories.' The point is clear: Pullman himself sees religion as a threat that must be overcome and it can be overcome by telling the 'truth' about religion... to children and young people. His Dark Materials is Pullman at war.