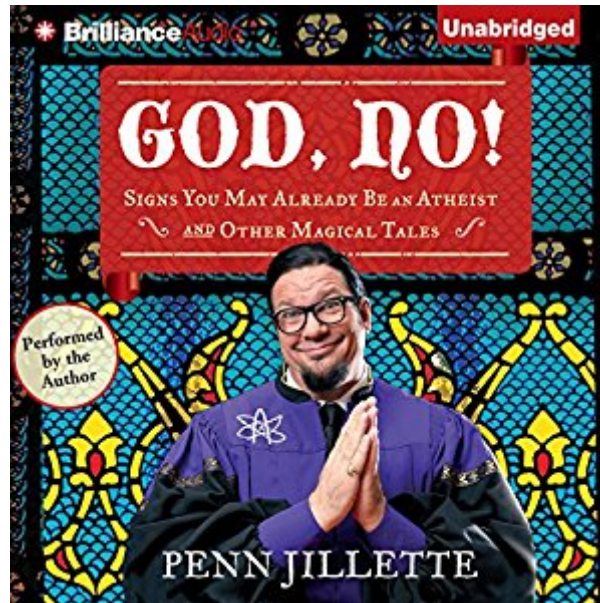


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God, No!: Signs You May Already Be An Atheist And Other Magical Tales



Synopsis

From the larger, louder half of the world-famous magic duo Penn & Teller comes a scathingly funny reinterpretation of The Ten Commandments. They are The Penn Commandments, and they reveal one outrageous and opinionated atheist's experience in the world. In this rollicking yet honest account of a godless existence, Penn takes readers on a roller coaster of exploration and flips conventional religious wisdom on its ear to reveal that doubt, skepticism, and wonder - all signs of a general feeling of disbelief - are to be celebrated and cherished, rather than suppressed. And he tells some pretty damn funny stories along the way. From performing blockbuster shows on the Vegas Strip to the adventures of fatherhood, from an ongoing dialogue with proselytizers of the Christian Right to the joys of sex while scuba diving, Jillette's self-created Decalogue invites his listeners on a journey of discovery that is equal parts wise and wisecracking.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

God No! is, I think, about the possibility of being a good person without believing in a supreme being. When Penn Jillette stays on point, he uses humor effectively to make meaningful arguments. When he rambles and digresses -- which he does frequently -- he dilutes that message. In the introduction, Penn tells the reader that he rambles, but the admission should be in all caps, printed in bright red ink, surrounded by stars and preceded by a WARNING sign. Penn tells us that he is an atheist, not an agnostic, because anyone who doesn't know whether there is a god necessarily doesn't believe in one and must therefore be an atheist. It seems to me Penn defines agnosticism

out of existence. Most people I know who call themselves atheists deny the possibility of a deity while those who argue that the existence or nonexistence of a supreme being is unknowable tend to call themselves agnostics. Penn understands the distinction but rejects it; in his words, "If you're not willing to pretend that matters of god can be certain, you're an atheist." I suppose Penn can define his terms any way he wants, but he didn't persuade me that "Do you believe in god?" is a question "that needs to be answered yes or no." I think it's a question that can legitimately be answered however an individual wants to answer it (including "I have no belief either way"), even if Penn thinks that any answer more nuanced than "yes" or "no" is "a cheesy grade school dodge." Definitions aside, there is something to be said for Penn's larger point: It is possible to live an ethical life based on rules derived from shared experiences that are not dependent on biblical commandments. This book, Penn tells us, is a response to Glen Beck's challenge "to entertain the idea of an atheist Ten Commandments."

Penn is profane and obnoxious, as anyone who's seen him on TV shows such as [and the irony here is that although they can sell it by name, I can't write the actual name without being censored, so let's just say "BS"] knows. And there's plenty of that in "God, No!" What some readers might not be as prepared for are the moments of sentiment, sometimes slipping into sentimentality. Penn is a big guy with a big voice, big opinions, big appetites, and a big heart. He values individuality above most things, and wears his admiration for courageous action and original thought on his sleeve. All of that comes out in this book. All of it. And not in any organized format, either, but as it occurs to Penn. And you know what? That's actually pretty cool. I found the book very hard to put down, precisely because of its conversational nature. The one thing I could live without--something Penn also employed in his novel "Sock"--is the more-or-less random use of song titles and quotes. Sometimes I found myself wishing he were a little less obscene because there are plenty of people I would love to share "God, No!" with, but a sizeable percentage of them would be put off by some of the language. But in truth, that's Penn's style, and even saying one wished things were different sounds like wishing "Lady Gaga would put some damned clothes on." Absurd on its face. So take Penn as Penn, and prepare to meet an interesting cast of characters from all strata of society, punctuated by a fresh take on the "Ten Commandments" that is unbelievably sane and erudite. But the heart of "God, No!" relates to friendship and family. The "baptism" of former Hassidic Jews into a sort of sacrament of bacon, for example.

I must admit that my feelings about this book are a bit schizophrenic. I do really enjoy Mr Jillette -

funny as hell, irreverent, outspoken, unfiltered. All stuff I love. Hence, it was fun to read about his escapades and outlook. Yes, I am an atheist, a scientist (climate change - yes, we exist!) and have an eclectic political viewpoint. So, I am a forgiving reader of Mr Jillette, for sure. So, first the bad news: The trouble I had is a similar problem I have had with some books of late written by entertainers in which they attempt to tread, at times, on more serious matters with a license borrowed from their celebrity. It is a danger that a big microphone has on many..... they think because the big microphone keeps showing up (because they are funny, sing well, act well, entertain) their view on politics, family psychology, science, etc are equally sharp, informed and worth listening too. This is often just not true (though there are exceptional cases). His libertarian snippets for example..... he falls into the same childish, simplistic view of the world that most unstudied libertarians do. Once you spend any time actually trying to manage anything bigger than a 2-man show or a small business, you quickly learn that the Randian bumper stickers sound great but are for dorm rooms and chat rooms - not serious contributions to actually governing much and just serve to add to the clatter of uninformed opinion. Similarly with climate change - though Jillette confesses he doesn't know much about it and recounts his overstatements in the past, he does so with the "insult first, then say it was a joke" approach. "I don't know" is indeed an honest position if he had just left it there. But while proclaiming to do that, he plays that "maybe" game that just comes off as manipulative.

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