

# There's the mystery

By [David Heim](#)

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Whatever you think of essayist

Christopher Hitchens, you have to admire his willingness to have a debate about God with just about anybody. Since he wrote *God*

*is Not Great: Religion Poisons Everything*, he's taken on theologians,

rabbis and Fox News pundits. Last month in Toronto, in the midst of his current treatment for cancer, Hitchens [debated](#)

[Tony Blair](#). Hitchens has even publicly [debated](#)

[his own brother](#), an Anglican [priest](#) believer.

The documentary [Collision](#)

follows Hitchens on the road as he holds a series of debates with evangelical theologian

Douglas Wilson. Hitchens comes off as a genial fellow (so does Wilson) carrying on the great British tradition of debate: you fiercely try to demolish your opponent and then go out for drinks together afterwards.

Nothing, however, seems

to dislodge from Hitchens's mind the notion that God is a despot in the sky and that religion offers empty or dangerous fairy-tale explanations. Debaters' efforts to expand Hitchens's view of who God might be or what religion does gain no traction.

What makes Hitchens

untouchable in debate is finally that he's tone deaf to religious questions--he is always beating a straw man. In the film, for example, Wilson keeps trying to push Hitchens to consider the sources of the morality that Hitchens asserts. (Hitchens himself is a forceful defender of human rights.) Wilson wonders what our sense of right and wrong is grounded in, if it is not grounded in some transcendent reality. Is morality just a matter of cultural taste or individual assertion? That's a question that philosophers from Kant to Nietzsche have asked,

but Hitchens has no patience for it.

Wittgenstein once said, "Not how the world is, but that it is, is the mystery." In other words, religion has to do with why there is something and not nothing. Where did all this come from? Where does our sense of beauty and goodness come from? What basis do we have for an unshakeable sense of right and wrong?

Hitchens has no interest in such questions. But if such questions don't stir you--and arouse some awe, wonder and humility--then you're just not interested in religion.