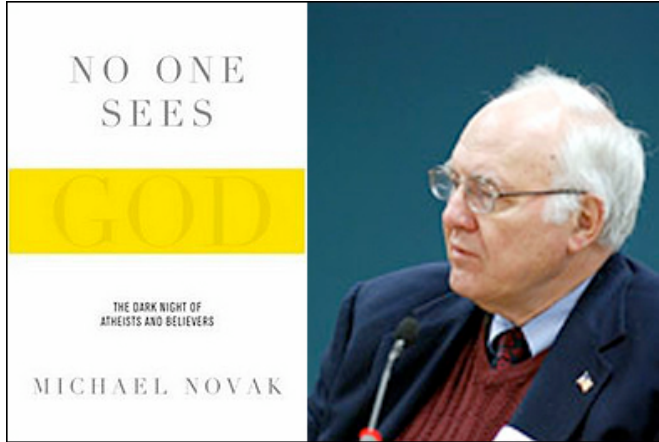


## RDBook: Dialogue in the Dark

Nathan Schneider

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In Book X of *Laws*, Plato sighs, "Who can be calm when he is called upon to prove the existence of the gods?" Still, he concludes, "it must be done."

It is with Plato's mix of impatience and good will that Michael Novak enters the "New Atheist" spree of polemic-publishing that was inaugurated several years ago by Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. His contribution, *No One Sees God: The Dark Night of Atheists and Believers* (Doubleday, 2008), makes the welcome call for dialogue in a discussion that has been dominated by bombast, name-calling, and confrontation between the only two sides, theist and atheist, that are thought possible. But even at his most conciliatory moments, Novak's frustration comes through; as if with Plato, he wonders, "What are atheists missing that everyone else gets?"

Novak is a self-described neoconservative and holder of a chair in religion and public policy at the American Enterprise Institute, a think tank that has claimed considerable influence during the present Bush administration. There he has worked to cultivate a theological vision for what he calls "democratic capitalism," weaving economics, social justice, family values, and personal faith together in an attractive package. Even if politics had no place in the text (and it does), this man's answer to the atheists cannot help carrying political weight.

Michael Novak is not the type of rigid neocon that progressives love to hate. In fact, few would seem better suited for the call to dialogue. Remember the long-lost mantra of "compassionate conservatism"? In person and in writing, he exudes warmth, openness, and optimism for a fallen world. Every page exhibits a kindly care with words. Trained in Catholic seminaries, Harvard's philosophy department, and the "New Left" intellectual scene of the 1960s, his learning is eclectic and his heroes surprising.

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As the book's title suggests, Novak begins the search for common ground in existential

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The Editors

