

## Is Atheism Rational?

Atheism is the belief that God does not exist. The word *atheism* comes from the Greek word *atheos* meaning “without God”. The main appeal of atheism to its disciples is the sense of freedom that they feel from the idea of an ever watchful and holy God. Without God, the atheist is free from moral taboos and religious ritual, free from the fear of God’s judgment and punishment for sin, and free from the effort required to discern the absolute truth in a profusion of religious ideas and beliefs. But the price for their freedom is high. Having rejected the very existence of God, the atheist must also, by extension, believe that there is no objective truth, no basis for reason, no absolute morals, no ultimate value, no ultimate meaning, and no eternal hope.

*For today, on an ever increasing scale, people proclaim themselves to be atheists, not so much because of objection to alleged proofs for the existence of God, but rather because they consider that to affirm the existence of God is to set men at odds within themselves and with one another – Patrick Masterson.*

*All existing things are born for no reason, continue through weakness and die by accident ... It is meaningless that we are born; it is meaningless that we die – Jean-Paul Sartre.*

In contrast to the typically casual dismissal of God by the everyday atheist, the apostles of atheism are zealous and even obsessed with the non-existence of God.

*Atheism as we know it in the West is not merely lack of belief in, but rather an attack on God; only where God has been seen as real and personal can much energy be generated in the cause of rebellion against Him – Harold Brown.*

For those people wanting the freedom from God of the atheists, but without being quite so dogmatic, there is agnosticism. Agnosticism is the belief that there is insufficient evidence in the world to prove one way or the other that God exists. Agnosticism is simply atheism dressed up in sheep’s clothing. The final result is the same – the rejection of belief in God.

Are atheism and agnosticism valid beliefs? Are they rational, logical and reasonable? This paper presents arguments to show that atheism and agnosticism, which are considered here to be effectively one and the same, are not rational. Rather, they represent the choice that people make to live their lives without God. It is a choice not based on reason, but on personal preference.

*This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).*

### The Arguments of Atheism

While a large number of atheists accept atheism without reason, a good number of them affirm atheism on the basis of key arguments. The following are the standard arguments employed by various atheistic philosophers:

1. The existence of God is incompatible with the existence of evil.
2. God is a projection of man’s imagination.
3. Since God cannot be scientifically demonstrated, he cannot exist.
4. People believe in God because they are culturally conditioned to do so.
5. The idea of God is nonsensical, like the idea of a square circle.
6. If God made the world, who made God?

7. Since there is no evidence of God's existence, he does not exist.

These objections have been adequately answered by a great number of Christian philosophers and the following provides a brief summary of the responses:

1. The claim that God and evil are incompatible is an unproven assumption. Christians hold that the existence of God and evil are not only compatible, but that the existence of evil in fact *proves* the existence of God. This is because good must exist before evil can be understood as being the absence of good.<sup>1</sup> At any rate, the existence of God cannot be disproved based on an unproven assumption.
2. Claiming that God is a projection of man's imagination does nothing to disprove the existence of God. Again this is an unproven assumption. In this case, the assumption can only be confirmed by proving that God does not exist (leaving no alternative but for him to have been imagined), but how can someone disprove something that he believes does not exist? The premise is therefore logically flawed.
3. To argue that God must be testable by scientific means is to apply a false criterion. Science is useful in testing a number of physical phenomena, but there is no reason why God should be considered to be testable by scientific methods. Also, the person who argues that all things must be tested by science is not able to apply the same test to the assertion itself, since the making of an argument is not a physical phenomenon. There are other examples as well. How does one test love, values, morals, logic and beauty scientifically? The assumption that God must be scientifically testable is both arbitrary and self-refuting.
4. The argument that people believe in God because they have been culturally conditioned is one that cuts both ways. It could be equally argued that people who do not believe in God have been culturally conditioned not to believe. Again the argument is no more than an unproven theory, and a tenuous one at best. There are countless examples of people who have chosen to believe or not believe in God contrary to their culture and upbringing.
5. Asserting that the idea of God is nonsensical does not make it so. The assertion itself lacks both evidence and rationale. Why is the idea of God nonsensical? What laws of logic are violated? The assertion is arbitrary and without foundation.
6. The problem of where God came from is not a reasonable basis for rejecting the existence of God. The argument assumes that everything must have a cause. But this is only true of created things. Since God is the Creator of all things, he does not need to have a first cause. Christians argue that God has always existed. While it is hard for finite man to imagine the existence of an infinite and eternal being, nevertheless it is entirely possible. The argument, however, is more appropriately applied to the concept of an "uncaused universe". From both a scientific and a logical perspective it is unreasonable to expect that mindless matter created itself out of nothing or has always existed.
7. There is ample evidence to support the existence of God as presented in a companion paper.<sup>2</sup> The atheists and the agnostics who accept only direct physical evidence for the existence of a spiritual being are placing an unreasonable test on the evidence. No-one can see the wind, but we know that it exists by the effects that it creates. The fact that we can't see God does not mean that he doesn't exist anymore than not seeing the wind means that it doesn't exist (cf. John 3:8).

The arguments of atheism do not stand up to rational analysis. They are composed of presumptions and theories lacking in evidential support and logic. Rather than offering a

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<sup>1</sup> See also *If There is a God, Why is There Evil?* in this series.

<sup>2</sup> See the article *Does God Exist?* in this series.

philosophy of life, they reveal instead a predetermination to deny the existence of God by whatever means.

## **The Absurdity of Atheism**

Is atheism logical? How does an atheist know with certainty that there is no God? What proof is there for atheism? These are questions that one must answer if one wishes to be an atheist.

Atheism is essentially a religion based on blind faith. The atheist believes by faith that there is no God, and without any evidence believes that the universe either created itself out of nothing, which violates the known laws of physics, or else it has always existed, which violates the need for physical things to have a first cause. With no absolute truth, the atheist believes that some things are true and some are false. With no basis for morality, he believes that some things are right and some are wrong. Atheism is a religion without God, a faith without reason, and a journey without a destiny.

Atheists believe that what they cannot see does not exist. No one, however, can prove that God does not exist because that would require having all possible knowledge. The atheist would need to have infinite knowledge throughout all time, and be everywhere at the same time, to be absolutely sure of everything. In reality, the atheist would need to be omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. In other words, the atheist would need to be God in order to prove that there is no God! Atheism, therefore, is self-refuting (i.e., it fails to conform to its own criteria of validity or acceptability). The atheist needs to understand that he can only possess a very small part of all the knowledge that there is to know, and that there is a very real possibility that God exists outside of the knowledge that he possesses.

*The fool says in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1).*

Anyone who rejects the existence of God must believe the following creed:

- Matter is eternal.
- Matter without life created life.
- Matter without mind created mind.
- Matter without intelligence created intelligence.
- Matter without morals created morals.
- Matter without conscience created conscience.
- Matter without order or purpose created order and purpose.

Atheism is rationally impossible. In order to be an atheist one must:

- Prove there is no God.
- Refute all evidence for the existence of God.
- Explain away the reality of Christ.
- Remove the evidence for the resurrection of Christ.
- Disprove all the prophecies in the Bible.
- Demonstrate that the Bible is a fraud.
- Establish the credibility of atheism.

An atheist is not one who has no faith, but one who has no faith in God. Instead, he puts his faith in the belief that there is no God which is impossible to prove. He offers no evidence for his belief, but merely imagines that there is no God because God is outside of his frame of thinking.

*When a man ceases to believe in God he does not believe in nothing, he believes in almost anything – G. K. Chesterton.*

*Atheism is a disease of the soul before it is an error of the mind – Plato.*

## **The Agony of Atheism**

Atheism is a religion without hope. In the absence of God there is no basis for truth, morality, reason or meaning. There is no destiny, no hope of a better life, no value in our struggles, no consequences for sins, and no rewards for goodness. To the atheist, all of life is vain and empty. As one cynic declared, “God is dead, Marx is dead, and I’m not feeling too well myself.”

Atheism does not address the serious issues of life, but tries to avoid them. In their haste to free themselves from God, the atheists imprison themselves in despair. Many of the strongest advocates of atheism have ended their lives in this way. Arguably the most brilliant of all atheists was Freidrich Nietzsche. In his book, *The Joyful Wisdom*, Nietzsche wrote with great enthusiasm of the freedom he had found in atheism:

*In fact, we philosophers and “free spirits” feel ourselves irradiated as by a new dawn by the report that the “old God is dead”; our hearts overflow with gratitude, astonishment, presentiment and expectation. At last the horizon seems open once more, granting even that it is not bright; our ships can at last put out to sea in face of every danger; every hazard is again permitted to the discerners; the sea, our sea, again lies open before us; perhaps never before did such an “open sea” exist – Freidrich Nietzsche.*

But Nietzsche found life unbearable without God, and finally went mad. He wrote:

*My life now consists in the wish that it might be otherwise with all things that I comprehend, and that someone might make my “truths” appear incredible to me – Freidrich Nietzsche.*

Sigmund Freud also recognised the futility of examining life as an atheist:

*The moment a man questions the meaning and value of life, he is sick, since objectively neither has any existence – Sigmund Freud.*

Jean-Paul Sartre admitted that it was distressing to think that God does not exist, because it implies that man tragically stands alone in an empty space and meaningless universe without a spiritual home. Jackson Pollack struggled with living a life that he believed to be without purpose or design, and eventually committed suicide. John Cage was conflicted by his philosophy of a universe which exists by blind chance and the impossibility of living his own life in the same way. Listen to the agonising words of Bertrand Russell:

*That man is the product of causes which had no provision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his love and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collections of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labour of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins – all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built – Bertrand Russell.*

This despairing view of life is all that atheism offers. There is no freedom in atheism, only hopelessness. How contrary this is to the hope of the Christians. Their lives are lived in the assurance that God loves them and has promised eternal life to all who believe in his Son.

*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him (1 John 4:9).*

## Conclusions

Atheism rests not on a proven belief, but rather on the unsupported assumption that there is no God. It is a belief based on an idea. The idea itself stems from the personal desire of the atheists to be free of God. In this way they attempt to set themselves free of social, moral and religious constraints and responsibilities which do not fit with their thinking.

Atheism is not rational because it is impossible to prove that God does not exist. The principle arguments put forward by atheists to disprove the existence of God are invariably based on unproven assumptions and unreasonable tests. No matter what criteria the atheists employ, there will always remain the possibility that God exists outside of their knowledge and beyond the confines of their naturalistic view of the world.

Atheism not only fails to prove its case, it also fails to disprove the evidence for the existence of God. In reality, there is abundant evidence to support the view that the cosmos was created by an intelligent, purposeful and supernatural being. It is not enough for atheists to dismiss this evidence out of hand simply because, by their own definition, there is nothing to investigate. Saying that God does not exist, does not make it so. It is more reasonable to believe in God, because the existence of this life is impossible to understand without God.

Atheism is a belief based on blind faith. While it may afford its disciples a sense of freedom from God for a short time, the ultimate price is high. Atheism inevitably leads to a bleak and despairing view of life. It offers no solutions to the problems faced by people in their everyday lives, but instead increases their burdens by denying them access to the Christian God of love. Atheism is a religion without hope, without purpose, and without a destiny.

Christianity stands at the opposite end of the spectrum. Listen to the words of Christ:

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4:18-19).*

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3-10).*

*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die (John 11:25-26).*

If you would like to be among those who are being saved, this is what you should do:

- ❖ **Pray to Jesus Christ.** “The Lord is near to all who call on him ... he hears their cry and saves them” (Psalm 145:18-19).
- ❖ **Read the Bible.** You should start by reading the whole of the New Testament, asking Jesus to help you to understand what you are reading.

- ❖ **Join a church.** It is vital that you find a church which holds the Bible to be the final authority in all matters of faith and practice for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

### **List of Papers in This Series**

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Do All Religions Lead to God?

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### **Acknowledgments**

The following sources were used in the preparation of this paper:

*Christianity for Skeptics* by Steve Kumar and John Heining, World Wide Press., 1994.

*Christianity for Skeptics* by Steve Kumar, Hendrickson Pub., 2001.

Bible quotations are from the New International Version, 1984.