

ATHEISM

By Mark Paynter

An atheist is a person who has after looking at the evidence concerning God's existence rejected the evidence and states there is no God. Steve Kumar points out the word "Atheism" comes from the Greek word *atheos* meaning "without God"¹

Daniel Reid in tracing the history of Atheism from ancient times finds evidence for a variety of different types of atheism.

"The word *atheism* is a transliteration of a Greek word which means "without God." The term has come to mean a disbelief in the existence of God, but historically its use was more ambiguous, as in the ancient world where it was used to describe someone who held a personal belief in God yet who denied the official pantheon of Greece, as did Socrates, or the gods of Rome, as did the early Christians.

There are many kinds of atheists, the types determined by their reasons for rejecting theism. Charles Darwin is an example of those who reject the existence of God on the grounds that there is an inherent cruelty in nature, as seen in the struggle for existence among animal species. Karl Marx represents the view that sees religion and God as manmade institutions invented to ease emotional pain and explain life and death. For Marx faith in God was an aberrant belief arising out of the pressures of the class struggle. Marx went onto call religion the "opiate of the masses," in that it deadened the desire for social change in the present with a hope of heaven. For Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, God was an illusion, a childish projection that grew out of the insecurity of knowing that parents will die someday and the subsequent wish for a "father" who was perfect and would not die.

Some reject God on purely philosophical grounds. An example of this type of atheism is seen in the logical positivists who argue that since it is impossible to define God in intelligible terms (i.e., one cannot verify statements about God empirically), any statement about God's existence is meaningless.

For centuries one of the standard proofs of God's existence was the teleological argument that begins with the fact of life and the harmony of nature and argues that there had to be a grand and purposeful designer, God. The classic biblical reference for this line of reasoning is found in Romans 1:19–20. In the twentieth century such a view has been countered by scientific humanism, which sees no evidence for God in the design of nature since everything that exists, they argue, can be explained by scientific laws or human decisions.

¹ Kumar page 59

One of the most visible atheists in twentieth-century America has been the activist Madalyn Murray O’Hair (b.1919), whose efforts contributed to the 1963 Supreme Court ruling that declared unconstitutional the devotional reading of the Bible and the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer in public schools.”²

It is interesting to observe that some of the most influential thinkers in the world over the last 150 years have been Atheists. Western civilization has been shaped by much of their thinking as Reid points out their crowning moment may well have been in 1963 when reading of the Bible and prayer were declared to be unconstitutional in America. Steve Kumar points out that the central dogma of an atheist as

“There is no God.
There is no objective truth.
There is no ground for reason.
There are no absolute morals.
There is no ultimate value.
There is no ultimate meaning.
There is no eternal hope.”

C C Ryrie finds that

“The principal plank in the platform of the atheist is simply that God does not exist. Acting within this frame of reference, the atheist acknowledges no revelation from a transcendent being, nor does he seek or find his code of ethics in an external authority. If he is wrong about his basic belief, then his entire system of doctrine would have to be changed. And *believe* he must, for he cannot prove that God does not exist”³

Not all atheists can provide an adequate reason for why they believe what they believe. However Kumar points out that there are at least seven common reasons for belief in atheism.

- 1 Evil exists therefore it is inconceivable to think of a God who exists.
- 2 God is merely a projection of the imagination of man.
- 3 As it is not possible to scientifically demonstrate the existence of God, he does not exist.
- 4 People are culturally conditioned to believe in God.

²Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

³Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995, c1972).

5 “The idea of God is nonsensical like the idea of square circles.”⁴

6 If God made the world where did God come from?

7 Since there is no evidence for the existence of God, he does not exist.⁵

The Christian Apologists must refute each of these arguments.

1. As we shall see later, the existence of God does not logically imply that there should be no evil.

2. The idea that God is a projection of man’s imagination commits what philosophers term a “genetic fallacy.” A genetic fallacy occurs when one attempts to disprove an idea by merely tracing the idea to its origin. Such an argument may succeed in pointing out the origins of an idea but is not sufficient to disprove the truth of an idea. In other words the fact that an idea exists does not necessarily mean that it is true. Kreeft and Tacelli shows what a genetic fallacy is with a hypothetical example. “Suppose Einstein had discovered that $E = MC^2$ because he was a Nazi who wanted to invent the atom bomb to conquer the Allies and win the world for Hitler. That bad motive would not mean that E does *not* equal MC^2 . The objection commits “the genetic fallacy”: confusing the psychological origin of an idea with its logical validity.”⁶

3 To argue that God does not exist because it cannot be proven that He exists is to commit the fallacy of reductionism. “Science is useful in testing a number of phenomena, but to suggest that God must fit the scientific dress is arbitrary and wrongheaded. Science is useful for testing some things but not all things...How does one test love, values, morals, logic, beauty, etc scientifically?”⁷

4. To use the idea that people are culturally conditioned to believe in God would ultimately prove to have committed intellectual suicide. Kumar explains.

“The argument if taken to its logical conclusion would not only refute Christianity but also the atheistic beliefs...If all beliefs are conditioned, then the unbeliever is also conditioned not believe. This is a two –edged sword which will not only kill your enemy but will also kill you...To suggest that only religious people have hang-ups is to propose a false psychology, a questionable sociology, and an unverified scientific theory.”⁸

⁴ Kumar page 68

⁵ Kumar page 68

⁶Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Page 42 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

⁷ Kumar page 69

⁸ Kumar page 69-72

5. Steve Kumar calls “The idea of God is nonsensical like the idea of square circles” the straw man argument.⁹ The person who uses this argument defines God on his own terms in “order to shoot him down. To suggest that God is like a square circle is arbitrary. The atheist has no logical or epistemological grounds for making this assumption”¹⁰ Such an argument is a contradiction in terms.

6. Steve Kumar answers the objection “If God made the world where did God come from?” by stating

“This objection presupposes that God had a beginning. The argument “Everything has a cause, God is a thing, therefore God must have a cause” is a simple version of a “straw man argument.” Here the atheist subjectively and arbitrarily equates God to the order of the created and finite thing. By setting up God on the level of the created, the atheist insists that God must have a cause too. From a logical point of view, “Everything that begins has a cause,” but not as the atheist irrationally argue “Everything must have a cause.” Only finite beings and effects need causes. God by definition and essence is not an effect or something made. God is the unmade eternal Creator of the universe. To argue that an unmade being is a contradiction, the atheist must explain how one could maintain the concept of an “uncaused universe.” What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.”¹¹

7. Finally Kumar turns to the objection “Since there is no evidence for the existence of God, he does not exist”. In response to this question Kumar writes

“The logical response to this objection is to first examine the nature of the evidence – what constitutes evidence. Since there is a great amount of dispute as to what is legitimate evidence, we must first settle the issue of evidence. Since the nature and existence of God is unlike any other issue or category, one must approach God’s existence axiomatically. If God is the basic ground of reality, then the issue of God’s existence is not on the same plane as the issue of the existence of finite elements like humans and potatoes. For example, take the nature of air, debating the existence of God, in a sense, is like debating the existence of air while breathing. If God is the creator of the universe, then he is the necessary pre-condition for all of reality. If God exists, he is the essential element for all existence.”

Kreef and Tacelli present twenty different arguments for the existence of God.¹² Steve Kumar confines his discussion of the evidence for the existence of God to the following:

⁹ Kumar page 72

¹⁰ Kumar page 72

¹¹ Kumar page 72

¹² Refer Kreeft and Tacelli Chapter Three

1) conclusive cosmological evidence 2) compelling teleological evidence 3) conscious moral evidence and 4) concrete Christ logical evidence.¹³

In response to these arguments an atheist clings to his belief that there is no God
At this point Atheism becomes a religion like any other

“Atheism is essentially a religion based on blind faith – it takes greater faith to be an atheist. The atheist by faith believes there is no God and without any evidence believes the universe was uncreated. With no absolutes he believes in morality. Without a foundation he believes in value and without God he believes in life. Atheism is a religion without God, a faith without reason and a journey without a destiny. An atheist is not a person without beliefs but one who upholds a variety of beliefs. What Mark Twain said equally applies to atheists “It is amazing what a man will believe as long as it is not in the Bible.” To be an atheist you must accept the impossible, believe the ridiculous and trust the absurd. From a logical point of view it is impossible to disprove God.”¹⁴

This is because atheism fails on two basic principles. The first principle is to make the statement that there is no God in the universe is to make the claim that one knows all there is to know about the universe. The only possible person who could make this statement is an all-knowing God. To make the statement denies God and yet the person making the claim is stating that they have the same knowledge as God, this is an absurdity. However it goes even further than this as Steve Kumar points out

“In order to maintain the premise, “There is no God,” the atheist must have total knowledge of all reality. He must know all facts and realities of existence. This means that an atheist must have a knowledge that only God could possess. He must possess infinite knowledge throughout time, be everywhere at the same time and be absolutely sure of everything. In reality the atheist must be omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent in which case the atheist must become God in order to prove there is no God. In fact he has to become the very God he is seeking to disprove. But the atheist says there is no God, so how could he argue you his position? There is no way by which he could defend his case.”¹⁵

In order to deny that the universe was created an atheist must believe that

- 1 Matter is eternal.
- 2 Matter without life created life.
- 3 Matter without mind created mind.

¹³ Refer Kumar Chapter One

¹⁴ Kumar page 74

¹⁵ Kumar page 74

- 4 Matter without intelligence created intelligence.
- 5 Matter without morals created morals.
- 6 Matter without conscience created conscience.
- 7 Matter without purpose created matter and purpose.”¹⁶

If those beliefs are to have any validity at all then the atheist must go on to

- 1 Prove that there is no God.
- 2 Refute all the evidence for the existence of God.
- 3 Explain away the reality of Christ.
- 4 Remove the evidence for the resurrection of Christ.
- 5 Disprove all the prophecies in the Bible.
- 6 Demonstrate that the Bible is a fraud.
- 7 Establish the credibility of the evidence.”¹⁷

Kumar concludes with this tragic story to illustrate the futility of atheism.

“Some time ago they buried an atheist dressed up in a beautiful tuxedo. After a tombstone was placed on his grave, a cynic wrote the following words. “Here lies an atheist all dressed up but no where to go.” Atheism is a journey with a destiny, a body without a soul, a religion without a reason, life without meaning, a faith without hope and a universe without a God.

The truth of atheism is the death of truth.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Kumar page 78

¹⁷ Kumar page 78

¹⁸ Kumar page 78