



Atheism & Agnosticism

Atheism: The disbelief or lack of belief in the existence of God or gods.

Agnosticism: The existence of God, of the divine, or the supernatural is unknown or unknowable.

Atheists believe...

1. God does not exist.
2. Matter is all that exists.
3. Any event that seems supernatural is really a natural occurrence.
4. Miracles do not occur.
5. Several factors argue against the existence of God.

"The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be." —Carl Sagan ("Cosmos," 1980)

What Can We Know About God

- ▶ God cannot be measured and quantified, there is no viable proof for his existence.

What Can We Know about Right and Wrong?

- ▶ *Big Idea:* "If there is no God, everything is permitted."—Fyodor Dostoevsky
- ▶ We can behave morally without believing in God.
- ▶ We can know what's right/wrong or good/bad without believing in God.
- ▶ We don't need God in the picture to explain Objective Morality.
- ▶ Transcendent moral absolutes do not exist.
- ▶ Morality is relative to one's perspective or cultural norms.
- ▶ Values are accepted to aid in our survival as a species.
- ▶ Values must originate with human beings.
- ▶ An individual's judgment or the culture's majority determines societal values.
- ▶ "Good" is what is best for the greatest number.

Is Belief in God Compatible with Science?

- ▶ *Big Idea:* Whatever begins to exist has a cause; the universe began to exist; therefore...the universe has a cause.
- ▶ Some physicists think universe has no beginning.
- ▶ Particles pop into existence uncaused at the sub-atomic level.
- ▶ Who or What Caused God? Doesn't he also need an explanation?
- ▶ Questions that were once answered by appealing to religion and God have been solved by science. (i.e. flat world)
- ▶ God is not needed to fill in the gaps.
- ▶ Even if the universe had a beginning, this does not mean that God caused it.
- ▶ Human origins can be explained by evolution, not by God.
- ▶ The belief in a "supernatural" is inconsistent with science and the natural order.
- ▶ Miracles cannot exist and are contrary to the scientific method.

If God is Good, Why Is There Evil?

- ▶ Theists claim that God is all powerful and all loving.
- ▶ But they also believe that evil exists both morally (in what people do) and naturally (in earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, etc.).
- ▶ How could a loving God allow such evil.
- ▶ A good God must have a good purpose, so if evil exists, there cannot be an absolutely good God.
- ▶ The reality of evil demonstrates that either there is no God or God is not good.
- ▶ "The Problem of vindicating an omnipotent and omniscient God in the face of evil...is insurmountable. Those who claim to have surmounted it, by recourse to notions of free will and other incoherencies, have merely heaped bad philosophy onto bad ethics."—Sam Harris
- ▶ There is no good reason that would justify God in allowing a child to be raped and murdered.
- ▶ There is no good reason that would justify God in allowing so much evil rather than a lot less.

The Bible is unreliable and a Collection of Myths

- ▶ It was written at a time when people were easily fooled.
- ▶ Even though Jesus existed, the Bible was put together long after he died.
- ▶ The original Bible manuscripts do not exist.
- ▶ There's no way to know whether anything written about Jesus is true.
- ▶ The Bible is full of contradictions and scientific errors.

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH ATHEISTS

- ▶ DON'T Assume that atheists and agnostics have nothing positive to contribute.
 - Many believe in positively contributing to society, the cultivation of ethical values, and are supportive of the arts, education, and science.
- ▶ DO Carefully consider arguments presented by atheists and agnostics.
 - God calls Christians to reason, to use their minds, and to “test everything.”
- ▶ DON'T Be combative.
 - Scripture calls Christians to speak to others “with gentleness and respect.”
 - Gentleness and love in the midst of hostility will be a silent but powerful witness.
- ▶ DO Learn arguments supporting God's existence, the Bible's reliability, and the core truths of Christianity.
 - Atheists and agnostics often have good questions.
 - Christianity has great answers.
- ▶ DON'T Be afraid.
 - This may be difficult, particularly for Christians new to sharing their faith.
 - The more you learn about the reality of Christ, the more comfortable you will be in dialoguing with others.
- ▶ DO Pray for atheists and agnostics, as well as for your own ability to share with them.
 - Discussing God is more than having the right arguments—it is also about having a prepared and humble attitude.

RESPONDING TO ATHEISM

Proof or Evidence?

- ▶ There is no single proof for God's existence.
- ▶ There is no single proof for anything.
- ▶ What we have is various pieces of evidence.
- ▶ The preponderance of evidence leads us to the existence of God.

What Can We Know about God?

Creation

- ▶ Our universe shows evidence of a Creator.
- ▶ Called general revelation, these are things God reveals about himself through nature to everyone.

Communication

- ▶ The content of the Bible gives evidence of divine origin.
- ▶ Called special revelation, these are the things God told to specific people at specific times.

Conscience

- ▶ The moral law written on human conscience points to a Moral Lawgiver. (Romans 2:15)
- ▶ The very nature of reason is in question if an objective moral standard doesn't exist.
- ▶ If humans are the products of evolutionary chance, why should our reasoning abilities be trusted?

Arguments for the Existence of God

➤ The Cosmological argument

- ▶ Everything that had a beginning has a cause.
- ▶ The universe had a beginning.
- ▶ Therefore, the universe had a cause.

➤ The Design argument

- ▶ Every design has a designer.
- ▶ The universe—and life—has a highly complex design.
- ▶ Therefore, the universe had a Designer.

➤ The Fine-tuning argument

- ▶ Intelligent life requires very specific values for it to exist.
- ▶ Slight variations would be catastrophic.
- ▶ The odds that the strength of gravity would fall within a life-permitting range are 1 in 10⁶⁰
- ▶ The odds that the cosmological constant (the strength of gravity in a vacuum) would fall within the life-permitting range are 1 in 10¹²⁰
- ▶ The number of atoms in the observable universe is estimated to be 10⁸⁰.
- ▶ So the odds of getting even one of these constants right is on par with the odds of finding a randomly marked atom somewhere in the visible universe.
- ▶ Dr. A. Cressy Morrison, past president of the New York Academy of Sciences said, "So many essential conditions are necessary for life to exist on our earth that it is mathematically impossible that all of them could exist in proper relationship by chance on any one earth at one time".
- ▶ The odds of these very specific values occurring in our universe by chance are astronomically small.
- ▶ The odds are so small, it can only be attributed to an intentional intelligent Designer.

➤ The Moral Argument

- ▶ Moral laws require a lawgiver.
- ▶ Absolute moral laws exist.
- ▶ Therefore, there is an absolute Moral Lawgiver.
- ▶ How is it that an impersonal universe could result in personal morality?
- ▶ There must be a standard of justice by which to pronounce something unjust.
- ▶ Values are rooted in God's nature; therefore, standards of right and wrong flow naturally from God.

➤ The Immaterial Argument

- ▶ The mind-body problem is a challenge for atheists and agnostics.
- ▶ There appears to be an immaterial component to human beings.
- ▶ Ideas matter to humans.
- ▶ Freedom, love, justice, and humor are immaterial concepts.
- ▶ The very things that make us most human are these immaterial truths.
- ▶ This data is ignored by the materialist or dismissed as irrelevant.
- ▶ If God exists, the case for the immaterial makes sense.

➤ The Inspired Bible Argument

- ▶ Some portions of the New Testament were written within 20 years of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.
- ▶ These portions put forth core truths about Christianity.
- ▶ Many witnesses to Christ were still alive when the New Testament was written and circulated.
- ▶ All ancient works were written on fragile material such as leather or papyrus.
- ▶ We do not possess the original manuscripts, but we do have completely accurate copies that convey all the essential truths of the originals.
- ▶ We have only 7 copies of Plato written 1,300 years after his death.
- ▶ We have over 5,000 copies of the New Testament written within 20-150 years.

➤ What about Evil?

- ▶ The dilemma: Either God has allowed evil for a good purpose, or evil is a power equal with God.
- ▶ The Bible shows that God did, indeed, allow evil for a greater good.
- ▶ This is not the best world, but the best way to the best possible world.
- ▶ Without a standard of right and wrong, how can one call anything “evil?”
- ▶ “Evil” and “injustice” are concepts that require the existence of a standard.
- ▶ If God does not exist, where does this standard come from?
- ▶ Evil only exists as a negation of good.
- ▶ God did not create evil, but by creating free creatures God left open the possibility of the choice of evil.
- ▶ God is responsible for the fact of freedom, but not the acts of freedom.
- ▶ If God were to destroy all evil now, no one would exist.
- ▶ God would have to destroy both actual and potential evil.
- ▶ To destroy evil, God would have to destroy all free will.

➤ Your Personal Experience Argument

- ▶ Your story of coming to know God is extremely powerful.
- ▶ Don't be afraid to share it!