

Reaching Secularists for Christ

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The structure of our time tonight

- Part 1. Understanding Secularism
 - Defining the different types of secularists
 - Debunking the biggest myth about secularism
 - Understanding how secularism relates to the idea of faith and other religions
- Part 2. Responding to Secularists
 - Reasons to think Christianity is true
 - Reasons to think Christianity isn't evil (since most people see the value in religion now)
 - Responding to Universalism

What do we mean by “Secular”

- **Agnostic**- I don't know if God is real or not
 - **Skeptic**- I am skeptical of any evidence of the supernatural/I'm not convinced
 - **Apatheist** I don't care
 - **Universalist**- I think all religions are true
- **Atheist**- I believe that God does not exist

Myth- Secularism is the default position

- Secularism is a religious worldview that requires faith and makes claims about the divine
- It's not the default- it's one worldview amongst many that needs to make its case in light of other worldviews.
- Numerically, secularism is the tiny minority
- Therefore, a secularist can't assess the plausibility of evidence for a religion in a vacuum, he has to compare it to the evidence for secularism (and every other worldview).
- Secularism requires faith- we'll see how, but let's first define faith

Why is faith important?

- Hebrews 11:1 “faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”
 - Faith is using the things we can see, to trust in the things we cannot see.
- Faith is like overdraft protection
 - If we only trust what we can see, then our beliefs are on very uncertain ground. Faith allows us to not be slaves to our immediate experiences
 - This is why Jesus said to Thomas “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”. (John 20:29)

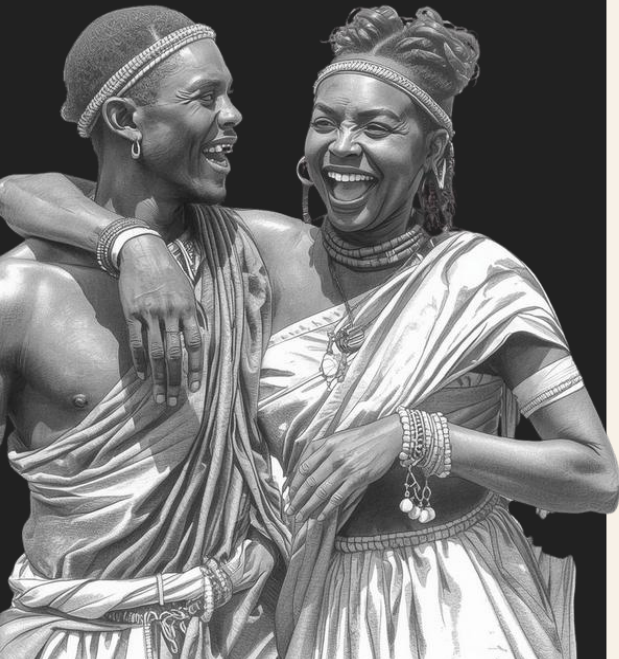
How Secularism requires faith

- **Universalist/ Apatheist**- faith that it doesn't matter if God is real, or which God is real
- **Atheist/Skeptic**- faith in the reliability of their mental faculties, and faith in morality
 - The evolutionary problem
 - The cultural problem
 - The problem of universal benevolence
 - The problem of universal human rights

Without God, our mental faculties are conditioned for survival, not truth

Alvin Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism:

- On atheism, trusting our mental faculties undermines our trust in our own mental faculties
- Our brains evolved for survival, not truth perception



Imagine there are two tribes:

- One avoids sibling marriage because they think those people's babies will have genetic defects
- The other avoids it because they think those peoples' babies will be born as baboons
- All else being equal, the false belief will not be selected out of the human gene pool

Without God, our mental faculties are conditioned by our culture

- Prior to the enlightenment, the problem of evil was not commonly discussed as evidence against God- if God was real, he would have reasons to do things that we don't know
- Post-enlightenment, we believe that if we can't think of a good reason for God to allow suffering, then there is no good reason.
- This feeling of plausibility is just that- a feeling that is conditioned by our culture

A secular person must have faith to trust his intuitions about what seems plausible

Without God, there's no reason for universal benevolence

- Without God, our only possible grounding for morality is nature, and nature is evolution.
- Evolution encourages in-group benevolence and out-group hostility/violence/apathy
- Therefore, we have no good reason to act benevolently to other cultures, classes, species, etc.

Secularists must have faith that it really is good to express benevolence to others

Without God we cannot ground human rights

- Not Nature: Humans don't even have the right to life in nature, and animals have no rights
- Not History: Humans have almost been oppressed or oppressors in human history
- Not Government: Then rights would just be a gift that can be taken away without injustice

Secularists must have faith that human rights are real and worth defending



Secularism is not the default-it's a religious worldview

- It's faith-based
- It's a worldview
- It makes claims about the supernatural realm

Therefore, secularism has to make its case in light of the other major worldviews out there.

End of Part 1.

- These challenges to secularism don't prove it's false, but they do prove that **the secularist has just as much of a burden of proof** to argue for his worldview as any other religious person does.

Part 2. How do we talk to Secularists?

- Agnostic- I don't know if God is real or not
 - **Skeptic**- I don't believe in the supernatural/I'm not convinced
 - Are you skeptical about your skepticism?
 - Are you skeptical about trusting your own mind?
 - Are you skeptical about being in the tiny minority of non theists?
 - **Apatheist** I don't care
 - If Christianity were true, what would that mean for your life?
 - **Universalist**- I think all religions are true
 - How do you know that? What is your method of comparison?
- **Atheist**- I believe that God does not exist
 - Are you familiar with arguments for God's existence?

The Questions we need to discuss

1. Is there evidence for theism in general?
2. Is there evidence for Christianity specifically?
3. Is there evidence for Christianity uniquely?
4. If Christianity is true, is it good?

Before we start: What is their barrier to belief?

- Many people's barrier to belief is emotional, not intellectual
- If their barrier to belief is purely emotional:
 - Learn their story- their faith background
 - Share your story about what God has done in your life/ is doing in your life
 - Share about the beauty and truth of the Bible
 - Share about the community of the church
 - Offer to pray for them
 - Be a kind, bold Christian friend to them
 - Do not jump into an intellectual argument, that's solving a problem they don't have

If their barrier to belief is grounded in an argument of some sort

- Three types of arguments
 - Christianity is false (externally inconsistent)
 - Christianity is evil (internally inconsistent)
 - Christianity is the same as all religions

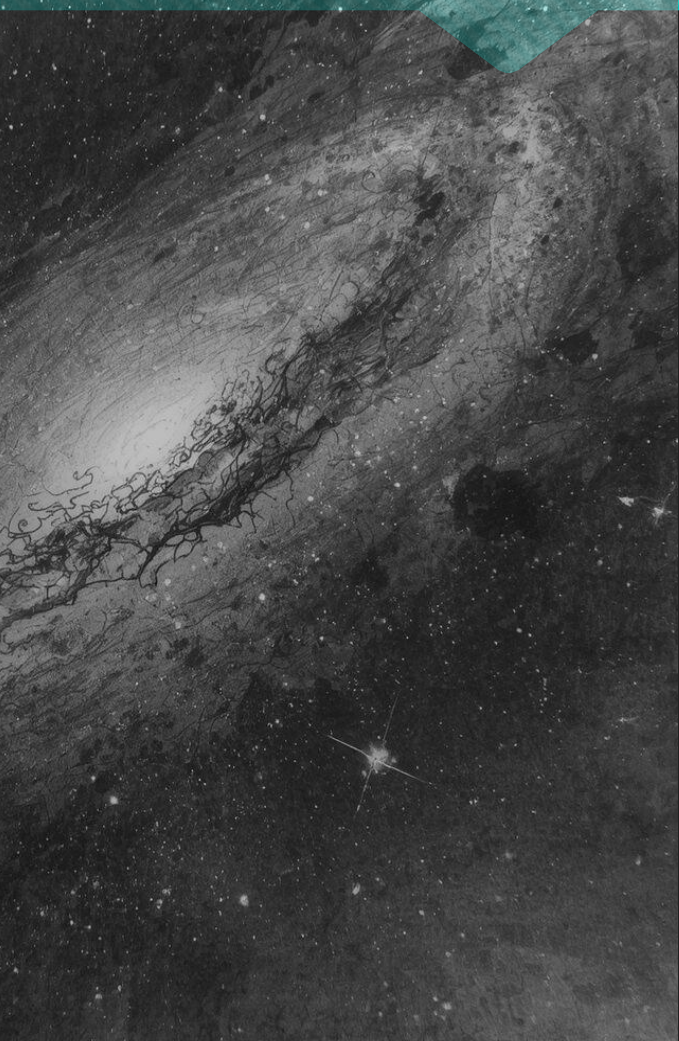
If their barrier is that Christianity is False

- There is no good evidence for God
 - There is no good evidence for the reliability of the Bible
 - There is no good evidence for the life/death/ resurrection of Jesus
 - There is no good evidence of God working today
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- Ask : “are you willing to go on a deep dive with me on this and take time to do it?” .
 - Do not feel like you need to answer anything immediately

If they are interested in arguments for the truth of Christianity

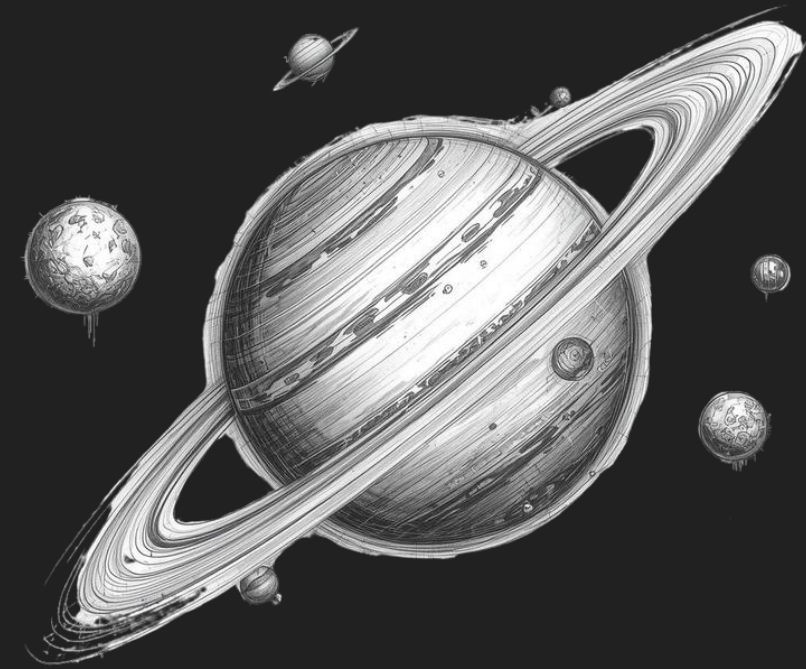
- Arguments for God
 - The Kalaam Cosmological Argument
 - The Leibnizian Cosmological Argument
 - The fine-tuning argument
 - The moral argument
- Arguments for the Bible
 - Onomastic congruence in the Bible
 - The linguistic-historical method establishing the reliability of the Bible
 - The preservation of the Bible through manuscript traditions
- Arguments for the Resurrection of Jesus
 - *The minimal facts approach* by Dr. Gary Habermas
- Arguments for God working today
 - *Miracles* by Craig Keener

The Fine Tuning Argument



- There are many fundamental constants and quantities of the universe such as:
 - Strong nuclear force
 - Weak nuclear force
 - Gravity
 - Cosmological constant ($\sim 1/10^{120}$)
- If these differed by even a tiny amount:
 - No stable atoms
 - No chemistry
 - No planets/stars
 - No life

Explaining the Fine Tuning



- Fine Tuning can be explained only by
 - Chance
 - Necessity
 - Design
- It can't be necessity
- There is no logical or mathematical reason for gravity to be exactly 9.8 m/s^2
- The constants could have been otherwise

Is Fine Tuning by Chance?

- If it is chance, the probability of life is astronomically small
 - This would be less plausible than believing a new city was formed only by the wind moving around minerals randomly.
- Some appeal to the anthropic principle
 - This is the idea that “The universe looks fine-tuned because if it weren’t, we wouldn’t be here to notice”



Why the Anthropic Principle Fails

- Being an observer does not eliminate the need for explanation
- Analogy:
 - You're in a plane when a bomb goes off. both pilots die, The wings tear off, and the plane begins freefalling into the ocean.
 - By sheer luck, the plane lands right side up on the only airstrip in the South Pacific



You could not say:
“This insane coincidence doesn’t need an explanation because I’m
alive to witness it”.

What About Multiverses?

- In order to make the chance explanation more convincing, some have hypothesized a multiverse theory.
- There's a multiverse with trillions/infinite of universes
 - There will be quite a large number which will be finely tuned
 - So our observation of the fine tuning isn't surprising.



The Fine-Tuned Brain Problem

In a multiverse, random universes pop into existence.

- A few will be whole, fine-tuned universes like ours
- But far more will just be a single brain that hallucinates a world around it.

Therefore, if you believe the universe is fine-tuned by chance, it's far more reasonable to believe you are a brain hallucinating the world, than to believe that you actually live in a fine-tuned universe.

No Observer		No Observer
	No Observer	No Observer
No Observer	No Observer	
No Observer	No Observer	No Observer
		No Observer

- The slaughter of the Canaanites
- Opposition to LGBT lifestyles
- The crusades/colonialism/other evils from Christians
- Hell
- The problem of suffering (particularly animal suffering)

Remember: This is an argument against the **internal consistency** of Christianity, so they have to enter into your world.

DO NOT LET THEM JUMP BETWEEN “CHRISTIANITY IS EVIL”
and “CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE” ARGUMENTS

Case study: the suspect's alibi

If their
barrier is that
**Christianity is
evil**

How to address these arguments

- “I would love to dive into this with you, but in order to show that my worldview is consistent, for the sake of argument, you need to accept my key premise.”
- Key premise: there is a God who is sovereign over all
- If they refuse, either they don't really care, their barrier to faith is actually emotional, or their real problem is that Christianity is false

Argument	Logically weaker but accessible response	Logically stronger but difficult response
The Slaughter of the Canaanites	- Response to wickedness - Relatively small scale - Drive out not kill - Exaggeration in the text	- God has the right to order people to do anything he wills - We don't have the knowledge or moral high ground to justify disobeying him
Opposition to LGBT lifestyle	- Opposes the sin, not the sinner - The mental/physical dangers of LGBT lifestyle	- God has the right to set the rules - We don't have the knowledge or moral high ground to justify disobeying him
The problem of animal suffering	- Animals don't suffer like humans do- they are not as conscious	- God has the right to make creatures for whatever purpose he wants- including experiencing pain - This would mean that animals by definition, do not suffer - We don't know what will ultimately lead to the most good.
God sending people to Hell	- Hell isn't torture, it's separation from God	• Hell is shut from the inside • God is holier than we can imagine, and we are more sinful than we can imagine
Wars/Colonialism/ other evils of Christians	- Christians are sinful and make mistakes - You have to judge a worldview by its teachings	- Christianity has done more good for the world than any other major religion - Christianity is the single greatest anti-colonial movement in history through Bible translation and international missions.
Evolution	- God made the world in six literal days	- The point of Genesis 1-3 is not to describe the physical process of creation

What's at stake here?

- The secularist will never be able to demonstrate that God could have no good reason for allowing something
 - Therefore, these discussions just come down a **probabilistic argument**.
 - Even if a given argument succeeds, it just means that lowers the overall probability that God is real.
 - However, that would be to look at each issue in a vacuum
 - The problem of the airplane engineer- do perceived design flaws prove an airplane has no engineer?
- This means we can
 1. Be honest and not defensive
 2. Address the heart issue- pride and lack of submission to God, even if he was real

A God who is big enough to get mad at for allowing evil, is also big enough to have reasons we don't understand

The Good that Christianity has done

- Science
- Human rights
- Ending slavery
- Opposing colonialism through Bible translation
- Hospitals/healthcare
- Education
- Caring for the poor/weak
- Provides meaning, hope, satisfaction, and joy

The issue with the probabilistic arguments from evil

The Moral Grounding Dilemma

- If objective evil exists, then there must be an objective standard to judge good and evil
- But, without God, there is no objective standard of good and evil
- Therefore, the belief that God is evil actually acts as a piece of evidence in favour of God's existence- not against it!

What really changes people's minds?

- Arguments do not usually change people's minds
- People change people's minds
- Increasing our visibility as Christians in the world- not necessarily preaching, just having people know we are Christians
- Case study- Are Christians hateful bigots?

Thanks for Coming!