

The Problems with Atheism

For the rest of the semester we will look at what other religions believe. But in this lesson we are going to critique atheism (since their belief system is pretty simple): there is no God.

Apologetics – Defending your own position.

Polemics – Attacking the position of your opponents.

Introduction

-Atheism is very uncommon historically-speaking.

-Traditional atheism

-Was often quiet and kept to itself.

-Sought to co-exist with other religions.

-Was based on philosophical (instead of weaker, merely scientific) evidence.

-Produced really sophisticated arguments.

-Included great thinkers such as Nietzsche, Sartre, de Sade, Freud, Camus, Mill, Marx, Heidegger, Hume, Russell, et. al.

The New Atheism

Major leaders

Richard Dawkins – Evolutionary biologist at Oxford University

Daniel Dennett – Professor of Cognitive Studies at Tufts University

Sam Harris – Neuroscientist and best-selling author

Christopher Hitchens – Journalist and cultural critic (died in 2011)

8 Features of the New Atheism

1. Boldness. They are excited about being atheists and want everyone to know.

“In fact, ‘atheism’ is a term that should not even exist. No one ever needs to identify himself as a ‘non-astrologer’ or a ‘non-alchemist.’ We do not have words for people who doubt that Elvis is still alive or that aliens have traversed the galaxy only to molest ranchers and their cattle. Atheism is nothing more than the noises reasonable people make in the presence of unjustified religious beliefs.” - Sam Harris

“We keep on being told that religion, whatever its imperfections, at least instills morality. On every side there is conclusive evidence that the contrary is the case, and that faith causes people to be more mean, more selfish, and perhaps above all, more stupid.” –Christopher Hitchens

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him will believeth in anything.” –Christopher Hitchens

“I have found it an amusing strategy, when asked whether I am an atheist, to point out that the questioner is also an atheist when considering Zeus, Apollo, Amon, Ra, Mithras, Baal, Thor, Wotan, the Golden Calf, and the Flying Spaghetti Monster. I just go one god further.” -Richard Dawkins

“There's simply no polite way to tell people they've dedicated their lives to an illusion.” –Daniel Dennett

2. Focus. They don't just deny a “god” in general but, specifically, the Christian God.

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully. -Richard Dawkins

3. Science. Their arguments are based more on science than philosophy (most of them are scientists).

4. Dogmatism. They attack even liberal forms of Christianity for aiding and abetting religion. They think agnostics are cowards.

5. Persecution. They believe Christians should be punished legally and socially for their beliefs.

6. Slander. They believe that catechizing children into a religion is child abuse.

7. Militarism. Theism must be eliminated to continue scientific progress and to achieve world peace.

8. Unsophistication – They don't seem to have a very good grasp on the issues, and they use arguments that have already been refuted by Christian thinkers.

-If you really want to read intelligent arguments for atheism then read the older guys I've listed above.

-The new atheists are not very sharp philosophically. Most of their arguments have already been addressed by Christian thinkers for hundreds

of years. They even quote atheist websites in their book as if that is an academic reference.

“I’d say that Richard Dawkins’ understanding of philosophy is sophomoric, but that would be an insult to my sophomores.” – Alvin Plantinga

Problems with Atheism

Ethics – They have no objective standard by which to truly call an action good or bad.

-Can you be good without God? Sure, but then what on earth do you mean by the word “good?” Do you just mean people *think* it is good? What objective standard are you using?

-If “good” is based on opinion then it doesn’t exist at all (we can have differing opinions).

-If “good” is based on popular opinion then as long as you can get enough people to agree with you, you can exterminate the Jews in the holocaust.

-If “good” is based on what produces more pain than pleasure for the greatest number of people (a view called “utilitarianism”), then as long as assaulting a child brought more overall pleasure than pain it would be good.

-Example of committing adultery with an atheist’s wife.

Existence – Atheism gives no explanation for why there is something rather than nothing, how the universe began, how we got to today, etc.

-What is the problem with thinking that the universe has always existed?

-It is unscientific to say that something physical (like the universe) was its own cause.

-Everything they believe about the beginning of the universe is conjecture.

Determinism – If nothing spiritual exists, then all the actions of humans are mechanistically determined. Humans cannot be held accountable for their actions; they could not have done otherwise.

-An explanation of this idea.

Identity – If humans are merely physical (and don’t have souls) then there is nothing consistent that makes me...me.

-You are merely a collection of memories. What if you get amnesia?

-All my biological cells are replaced several times during my lifetime. If I don't have a soul, then the person who murdered someone 10 years ago is literally a different person today than they were when they committed the murder.

-There is no "I," there is only a "we" of cells and bacteria and such.

Consistency – If the mind evolved, *not to find truth but to stay alive*, then the atheist is inconsistent in trusting their mind.

-The Christian, by contrast, is logically consistent in trusting their mind.

-Atheists often deny absolute truth and then hold, absolutely, that God does not exist.

-One cannot disprove the existence of God. How do you prove a universal negative for a being who is not material?

-Science changes every few years. How could you rest ultimate questions on it?

Evolution – Humans are merely one type of animal with no qualitative difference than another.

-Killing a human is the same, morally, as stepping on a bug.

-If it is best for humanity to pursue survival of the fittest, you should be trying to get rid of weak genes. Why help the sick, the poor, and the weak? Why support homosexuality or transgenderism (both of which do not help propagate the species)?

-Many atheists originally promoted racism because, if humanity evolved, then some forms of humanity might be more evolved than others.

The full title of Darwin's book, *On the Origin of Species* is: *On the origin of species by means of natural selection or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*

"The Western nations of Europe . . . now so immeasurably surpass their former savage progenitors [that they] stand at the summit of civilization...The civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage races through the world." –Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*

Evil – The atheist cannot say that anything is objectively evil, only that people do or don't like it.

-This means that one of the most common arguments against the existence of God (that there is evil in the world) is void. They cannot say there is “evil” in the world, only that things happen that they don’t like. They don’t like a pedophile’s actions, but they can’t say they are *objectively and universally* evil.

-You can’t say that God allows evil but that God doesn’t exist.

Teleology – There is no goal to anything. But things seem to have a goal (even evolution).

-A goal cannot exist without some *Mind*.

Love – Love does not exist.

-It is merely a chemical change in the brain. We think we “love,” but really we just have an evolutionary emotion to keep ourselves alive.

-Atheists like to act like they are humanitarian, but how many atheist hospitals can you name?

-Atheism is extremely intolerant.

Metaphysics – Most atheists say only material objects exist.

-What about thoughts, numbers, existence, concepts, etc.

Questions – Atheism does not ultimately explain why we are here, what gives life meaning, what happens to us after we die, why there seems to be some reported miracles, why we have an intrinsic conscience for right and wrong, why we seek for purpose and justice, why atheistic countries tend to commit the most atrocities, etc.

Final thought

The question is not “are there any problems with a Christian worldview?” The answer is “yes.” The question is, “are there more problems with an atheistic worldview than there is in a Christian worldview?” And the answer there is “yes” as well. *Which worldview makes more sense of the evidence that we have, even though neither worldview is water-tight?*