The City

ATHEISM

A Publication of Houston Baptist University

Winter 2015

THE CITY

A selection from Chapter 1 of the Proslogion*, written by Anselm in the late 11th Century A.D. Translated by M.J. Charlesworth, Oxford University Press, 1965.*

I acknowledge, Lord, and I give thanks that You have created Your image in me, so that I may remember You, think of You, love You. But this image is so effaced and worn away by vice, so darkened by the smoke of sin, that it cannot do what it was made to do unless You renew it and reform it. I do not try, Lord, to attain Your lofty heights, because my understanding is in no way equal to it. But I do desire to understand Your truth a little, that truth that my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand.

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Editor's Note

Jeffrey Green

Welcome to the Winter 2015 issue of *The City* focused on atheism. While the number of atheists in any given culture is difficult to determine, I think it is fair to say that atheists, at least when we are considering narrowly those who on reflection would confidently assert that God does not exist, are often in a minority. Indeed, before the 20th century communist countries, it is difficult to identify societies that formally and explicitly adopt atheism as the ideological norm. Even today with the growth in secularism and decline in religiosity, the Christian denominations, to say nothing of other theisms, vastly outpace any atheist organization or group in terms of numbers and organization. And yet, we have devoted a whole issue to a belief that registered at most 12% of the Americans in a Gallup survey in May of 2014.[1]

Atheism is a perennial contender for our hearts and minds and so while atheists themselves may be few (though rapidly growing) it is important that we face this challenge directly. I am here deeply indebted to the work of Dr. William Lane Craig, a colleague and one of our contributors, to the work he has done on arguing for the importance of apologetics. I commend to you, dear reader, a lecture that is available on the website of his ministry Reasonable Faith where he argues that Christian apologetics is necessary to shape culture, strengthen believers and evangelize the lost.[2] It is, to me, an essential piece of reading as it gives a rich and nuanced account of the ways in which apologetics serves the kingdom. The articles in this volume are largely, though not entirely, apologetic in nature. My hope is that they have a positive impact in your life and that they honor the purposes Dr. Craig has put forth so powerfully. Perhaps an article will address doubts that you or someone you know may

[1] http://www.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx, accessed November 24, 2015.
[2] See http://www.reasonablefaith.org/christian-apologetics-who-needs-it, accessed November 24, 2015.

be having. Maybe you will find a particularly insightful article that you can share with others and contribute to our communal worship of God with our minds. I encourage you to loan out your copy of *The City* (or better yet, fill out a free subscription card for a friend). In the body of Christ there are a great many first class thinkers and *The City* is one way in which we can communicate the truth of Christianity to the world.

In this issue we begin with a special feature from Timothy S. Goeglein. Mr. Goeglein is the Vice President of External Relations at Focus on the Family. We are privileged to bring to you a timely article with his reflections on the 50th anniversary of the Moynihan Report. The remainder of the issue is devoted to atheism and various responses to it. Some articles deal directly with arguments offered by the New Atheists while others consider various arguments for or against God's existence. In what may be new to some readers, we also feature two works on imaginative apologetics as Drs. Ordway and Latta deeply engage literature in a reminder of the diversity and richness of contemporary apologetics. We end with a review of Os Guinness' *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* by a long time contributor to *The City*, Dr. Louis Markos.

Finally, I would like to point to Dr. Craig A. Evans' article in this issue not only because it is a fine piece of scholarship but also because of his updated biographical information. It is with great pleasure that we recently announced that Dr. Evans will be joining us at Houston Baptist University this January as the John Bisagno Chair in Early Christian Origins and as dean of the School of Christian Thought. Please join with me in taking some time this winter to thank God for not only Dr. Evans but all the great faculty at HBU and to pray that Dr. Evans' inaugural year is a blessing to him, his family, and the students whom he will be serving.

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The Moynihan Report at 50

Timothy S. Goeglein

For most of the 1990s, I was privileged to work in the United States Senate for one of the best men in American public life, Dan Coats of Indiana. I began as his deputy press secretary, and later became his communications manager and press secretary. It was a joyous professional ride over nearly a decade, and I was honored to cross over with some of the largest personalities in the history of that august institution: Bob Dole of Kansas, Jesse Helms of North Carolina, Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, and Robert Byrd of West Virginia. With only one exception, Dole who is 91, they are all dead now, their legacies the subject for the history books.

But in my time as a staffer, there was no man, other than Coats himself, for whom I garnered more respect than a senator whose worldview, in elemental ways, was almost exactly the opposite of my own: Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York. Even before coming to the Senate, he had enjoyed an illustrious career, working for U.S. presidents of both political parties, and serving twice as a U.S. ambassador – first in India, and then famously as America's representative to the United Nations. His tenure at the latter accorded him the honorific as perhaps the most effective person the United States has ever sent to that global institution on the East River in Manhattan. Moynihan was fleet of foot and silver of tongue in an otherwise tangled international arena -- lithe, eloquent, an orator of gifted if eccentric locution.

During my tenure in the Senate, I made it a special point to follow Moynihan's career closely because he seemed to me the rarest thing in the American political arena: a public intellectual who earnestly valued the contest of ideas and welcomed the often spirited and unpredictable

thrust and parry that comes with it. Though a liberal Democrat who had made his peace with large government, he also acknowledged the limits of political power.

Also, Moynihan always seemed to find the right balance between constituent services and watching out for New York on one hand, while on the other hand finding a way to become a central player in the public policy realm far beyond his home state. He would regularly author and publish important, scholarly articles in small journals and magazines that ended up having a national and international impact, and often on topics and policies involving the American family. He had a gift for spotting domestic trends, for good and for ill, and galvanizing others to take special interest in what he had found, and none more so than in family concerns.

He had been raised in Hell's Kitchen in New York City, a tough and gritty part of town; he had made his way toward a PhD in sociology, and eventually became a noted and famous professor at Harvard. He was a supple, elegant, and gifted thinker and writer, drawing from empirical evidence the most astonishing and even prophetic conclusions based on data that others were not researching or had overlooked.

But the most controversial study he ever wrote, the one that propelled him to national attention, happened exactly 50 years ago this year -- an event worth recalling because it focused, with diamond-like intensity, on the direction of the American black family and the conditions under which children were being raised. His research would eventually elucidate the reasons for the heady breakdown of much of the nuclear family and marriages in the five decades to follow.

He wrote in 1965 that "The fundamental problem is that of family structure. The evidence – not final but powerfully persuasive – is that the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling."[1] On the day his report was released, about one-quarter of black kids were living only with their mothers. Moynihan called this a crisis, as indeed it was, but 50 years on, the numbers are nothing short of astonishing: Between 70 and 75 percent of all black Americans are now born out of wedlock, a tripling of the trend Moynihan had spotted. More than half of Hispanic children are both out of wedlock now while more than one-third of white babies are born to unmarried mothers.[2]

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[1] http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm, date accessed November 27, 2015.

[2] http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/360990/latest-statistics-out-wedlock-births-roger-clegg, date accessed November 27, 2015.

The goal of the Moynihan Report, he said, had been to begin a serious national conversation about the implications of those sizable numbers of wedlock births and what they said about the condition of the family and marriage going forward. In the intervening years, this avowed liberal Democrat, who adored Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John Kennedy, was denounced as a racist with a hidden agenda, which was categorically untrue and even absurd.

His fellow liberals believed that the social and cultural pathologies and problems Moynihan had identified could be effectively addressed by a major, historic expansion of the federal government. President Johnson's War on Poverty, launched in 1964, was defined, in part, as a series of programs that would effectively intervene with family and marriage breakdown, helping to arrest, reverse, and eventually nearly eradicate the problems that Moynihan had identified.

But Moynihan was skeptical, and with good reason. Government, he reasoned, could not tuck a child into bed at night; government could not save a marriage; government could not help a broken family fall in love again. These were, he said, primarily cultural problems and not economic or political problems, an insightful assertion in an era when trust in large government was broadly embraced by members of both political parties.

The Manhattan Institute's Jason Riley, who has researched and written about the historic relevance of The Moynihan Report, says Johnson's Great Society programs began a devastating pattern in America: "Marriage was penalized and single parenting was subsidized. In effect, the government paid mothers to keep fathers out of the home – and paid them well. For decades, research has shown that the likelihood of teen pregnancy, drug abuse, dropping out of school, and many other social problems grew dramatically when fathers were absent."[3]

Riley cites a 2002 study done by researchers William Comanor and Llad Phillips of The University of California, Santa Barbara. Their conclusions are succinct and sobering: "...the most critical factor affecting the prospect that a male youth will encounter the criminal justice system is the presence of his father in the home."[4]

The tragedy of The Great Society is the manner in which it helped

[3] http://www.wsj.com/articles/jason-l-riley-still-right-on-the-black-family-after-all-these-years-1423613625, date accessed November 27, 2015.
[4] Ibid.

catalyze the destruction of much of the family. In almost all categories that Riley researched – "including income, academic achievement, and employment [black American families have] stagnated or lost ground over the past half-century."[5] Some 51 years after The War on Poverty was launched with great fanfare, American taxpayers have spent $22 trillion -- $920 billion in the last fiscal year alone, according to The Heritage Foundation -- yet the results speak of near-failure in many areas of major federal expenditure.

For instance, the poverty rate for African Americans is about 30 percent, and 4 of every 10 black children are raised by single moms living at or below the poverty line. Statistics are dramatically different for black Americans who are married: the poverty rate is below 10 percent. Yet millions of kids are experiencing shattered lives because they are growing up in broken homes, and almost all of them without their biological dads.

Lest there be any debate that these trends have only adversely impacted black people, nothing could be further from the truth. According to the 2010 census, for the first time in American history, more than half of all babies born to American women 30 years of age and under were born out of wedlock. The Centers for Disease Control in March found that 25 percent of all American babies born since 2010 were to cohabitating couples, the highest ever in an American governmental study, and twice as high as just 10 years ago. A *Wall Street Journal* analysis put those numbers in stark terms: "Cohabiting parents now account for a clear majority – 59 percent – of all births outside marriage."[6]

America is experiencing both a plague of fatherlessness and a collapse of marriage among a key demographic. The Heritage Foundation's Robert Rector writes, "In 1964, 7 percent of U.S. children were born outside marriage. Today, that number is 41 percent. Society is dividing into two castes. In the top half, children are raised by married couples with college education; in the bottom half, children are raised by single mothers with a high school degree or less."[7]

Rector says there are more than 80 federal government welfare programs that almost all have one thing in common: they "provide very

[5] Ibid.
[6] http://www.wsj.com/articles/cohabiting-parents-at-record-high-1426010894, date accessed November 27, 2015.
[7] http://dailysignal.com/2015/02/15/how-the-welfare-state-penalizes-parents-who-marry/, date accessed November 27, 2015.

real financial incentives for couples to remain separate and unmarried."[8]

Moynihan once observed that the principle difference between liberals and conservatives was that liberals believed if you wanted to impact the course of American culture, you had to impact politics first; conservatives believed, he said, that if you wanted to impact politics, you had to impact culture first. That is a probing, relevant insight into how we are to address and attempt to solve some of the most important, and seemingly intractable, social problems America faces today.

"One important lesson of the past half century is that counterproductive cultural habits can hurt a group more than political clout can help it," Riley writes. "Moynihan was right about that too."[9]

Indeed he was, and devastatingly so. As a nation, we cannot continue on this present course of family fracture and marriage upheaval. It would seem to be an unsustainable course.

In 1995, looking back at his four decades in public life, Moynihan was asked what had been the biggest transformation he had observed: "The biggest change, in my judgment, is that the family structure has come apart all over the North Atlantic world."[10]

So how to think about the moral revolution we are living through a half-century after Moynihan published his famous analysis? One thing is crystalline: The cultural crisis will never be fixed by money alone. The family is foundational, and a bulwark against further erosion. It seems to me that culture still leads, and is upstream from what is happening in American politics of either party. Moynihan was right to assert that there is a direct tie between the decline of family and the social pathologies of the nation.

The Manhattan Institute's Heather MacDonald has eloquently echoed Moynihan, advocating for a father-centric prescription:

> The disintegration of the two-parent family is the greatest long-term threat to American prosperity and cultural health ... But more consequential than the risks to individual children is the

[8] Ibid.

[9] http://www.wsj.com/articles/jason-l-riley-still-right-on-the-black-family-after-all-these-years-1423613625, date accessed November 27, 2015.

[10] http://eppc.org/publications/walk-back-to-the-right-road-to-marriage-and-parenthood/, date accessed November 27, 2015.

> cultural pathology of regarding fathers as an optional appendage for child-rearing. A society that fails to teach its young males that they are unambiguously responsible for their offspring will have a hard time inculcating other fundamental duties. Unfortunately, family breakdown isn't amenable to public-policy solutions, since it results from something more profound than misguided tax structure or welfare rules ... the biggest culprit is feminism's devaluing of males and the conceit that 'strong women' can do it all ... Family decline will be stemmed only when it is widely understood that care provided by both biological parents is the most powerful social and economic advantage that any child can enjoy.[11]

Morals and manners -- more than government or legislation -- primarily shape the direction, scope, and currents of a great nation like ours. Any hope for renewal and regeneration will likely arise from our families with active and involved dads, churches that foster family cohesiveness, and ministries that make strong, nuclear families a priority.

The legacy of The Moynihan Report 50 years later confirms what his great friend George Will said about "the ecology of a nation," namely that "The most important business of [this] generation is the raising of the next generation."[12]

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[11] http://www.wsj.com/articles/ideas-for-renewing-american-prosperity-1404777194?cb=logged0.7139908756860458, date accessed November 27, 2015.

[12] http://www.theamericanconservative.com/pdf/sepoct15/files/basic-html/page10.html,, date accessed November 27, 2015.

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The Fool Says in His Heart, "There is no God"

Atheism in the Bible and in Late Antiquity

Craig A. Evans

The Bible is nothing if not a small library of books very much focused on God. God is presented as the Creator of the Universe, the architect of the planet earth — humanity's home — and of humanity itself. In the Bible God has revealed his character, his law, his wisdom, his grace, and his redemptive purposes. Through his prophets God has spoken to humanity in a variety of circumstances and on a great many themes and topics. God has rebuked humanity, including his own special people Israel, for its corrupt and sinful activities. Chief among these is humanity's tendency to indulge in idolatry, either in worshipping various gods or in making idols that represent these gods. There are passages in the Bible where humanity is rebuked for ignoring God. Yet curiously, the Bible says very little about *atheism*, the belief that there is no God.

Of course, having said that, a well-known verse immediately comes to mind: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'." The verse in fact occurs in two passages in the book of Psalms (at 14:1 and 53:1, verses in this article are from the RSV translation). Psalms 14 and 53 are slightly different versions of the same psalm, appearing in two distinct books (books 1 and 2) that make up the five books of the Psalter. Most commentators believe Psalm 14 is closer to the original form of the psalm. In yet another psalm the same assertion appears.

According to Psalm 10 we are told that the thoughts of the wicked may be summed up as "There is no God" and "God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it" (vv. 4, 11).

What is the meaning of the bold assertion, "There is no God"? Commentators rightly maintain that the statement is not a literal denial of the existence of God (or of gods), but a description of the wicked, who live and behave as though God takes no notice of human behavior. The respective contexts of Psalms 10, 14, and 53 support this interpretation. According to Psalm 10 the "wicked hotly pursue the poor" and the "man greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord" (vv. 2, 3). The wicked man believes that God "will never see" his evil deeds (v. 4). Moreover, this man believes that he will never encounter adversity, but will get away with theft and murder (vv. 6, 8, 9). According to Psalms 14 and 53 the man who says there is no God is corrupt, is a liar, and never does good. It is no surprise that the Apostle Paul cites portions of these psalms in order to make his point that no human is righteous and that none seeks for God (Rom 3:10–12).

Similar thoughts are expressed elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. According to Psalm 73 the wicked ask, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" (v. 11). We find the same idea in the Prophets. Jeremiah declares: "They have spoken falsely of the Lord, and have said, 'He will do nothing; no evil will come upon us, nor shall we see sword or famine'" (5:12), while in Zephaniah the Lord warns that he will punish men "who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill'" (1:12), that is, the Lord will do nothing in response to human behavior, whether to reward the righteous or punish the wicked. In short, the declaration "There is no God" is an expression of practical atheism, of living as though God is distant and indifferent.

Early Jewish interpreters understood the declaration "There is no God" the same way. This is seen clearly in the Aramaic paraphrase of the Psalter. According to this version (called the Targum), the thinking, "There is no God," implies the assumption on the part of the wicked person that "none of his thoughts are revealed before the Lord" (Tg. Ps 10:4). In Tg. Ps 14:1 the fool's declaration that "There is no God" is paraphrased to read, "There is no rule of God in the

land." Though expressed differently, the same point is made in Tg. Ps 53:1, "The fool has said in his heart that God does not punish him."

Accordingly, the atheists of the Bible are those who believe God takes no notice of human behavior, either to reward or to punish. The wicked man, therefore, may do as he pleases. He need not fear that God will observe or take action against him. The fool's assertion that "There is no God" is not an expression of philosophical atheism but rather a reckless assumption that God takes no interest in human affairs.

In late antiquity things began to change. To be sure, belief in God (or, in most cases, in the *gods*) remained almost universal. Explicit and outright atheism is very hard to detect in the classical world of late antiquity (though see the discussion of Philo below). Nevertheless, in some philosophical circles traditional beliefs about the gods were beginning to be questioned. A small number of philosophers and writers in the Greek world questioned the existence of the traditional gods, that is, the gods of Olympus. For example, some claimed that Epicurus, who publicly taught that the gods existed but took no notice of human affairs, was really an atheist but kept this opinion private out of fear of the public (*apud* Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.85.121). In an academic setting as described in Plato the question of the existence of gods or God was raised (*Apology* 26c).

Elsewhere Plato speaks of contemporaries who believe that the world is governed by chance, not gods, and that morality is man-made, not divine (*Laws* 10, 889a–890a). Similarly, in a play by Critias a character asserts that the gods are an invention designed to deter crime that otherwise would go undetected and therefore unpunished (*Sisyphus* frag. 19). Plato also speaks of those (like "public" Epicurus) who assert that the gods exist but are indifferent to humanity (*Laws* 10, 885b, 899d-e). Here we have a practical atheism not unlike what we see in the Hebrew Psalms.

Although theism was almost universal in the Mediterranean world of late antiquity, a "vocabulary of atheism," one might say, did emerge. The two principal words are *atheos*, an adjective that means "godless" or "ungodly," and *atheotēs*, an adjective that means "ungodliness." Neither word implies the idea that there is no god. The words almost always are used in reference to the impious or to those who fail to

honor the gods properly. *Atheos* can also be in reference to a person (or thing) that has been abandoned by the gods, i.e., he is a man who is "without god." We find an example of this use in Sophocles (*Oedipus Tyrannus* 662), as well as in later magical texts (e.g., PGM 36.319: "I want to flee the godless [*atheos*] Typhon"; ibid. 36.337: "consume with fire the godless [*atheos*] Typhon"). Examples of *atheos* meaning showing the gods no respect are found in Sophocles (*Trachiniae* 1038), Aristophanes (*Thesmorphoriazusae* 671), and Euripides (*Orestes* 916).

The vocabulary of atheism in late antiquity also includes the adjectives *atheei*, meaning "without God (or the gods)" or "without the assistance of the gods," *atheia* (same as *atheotēs*) meaning "impious" or "without respect for the gods," and *atheiastos*, meaning "uninspired by God (or the gods)."

We encounter some of this vocabulary in Jewish and Christian literature. For example, in the *Sibylline Oracles* pagan temples are said to be "godless" (3:32). Later oracles in this diverse collection refer to "godless men" (5:309), "godless laws" (8:106), and "godless service" (8:394). The *Testament of Solomon*, a late first-century Jewish pseudepigraphon, refers to a "godless angel" (6:3). These examples make use of the adjective *atheos*. A second-century Christian pseudepigraphon declares, "[S]inful, unrighteous, and impious [is] the man who falls away from piety and righteousness and godliness" (*Apocryphon of Ezekiel* 4:1). Here, "impious" translates *atheotēs*.

In the writings of Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish apologist and allegorist who lived at the turn of the era, most occurrences of *atheos* mean "without god," "atheistic opinions" (*Allegorical Interpretation* 1.51), "atheistic reasonings" (ibid. 2.57), "impious opinion" (ibid. 3.13), "impious disposition" (ibid. 3.212), and the like. Philo also makes use of *atheotēs* in the sense of "impious" or "godlessness" (e.g., *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.33, 108; *On the Sacrifices of Cain and Abel* 69; *On the Posterity of Cain* 2, 52; *That God is Unchangeable* 21; *On Drunkennes* 18, 78; *On the Confussion of Tongues* 2, 114, 121, etc.).

But Philo does make use of *atheos* and *atheotēs* in contexts where he speaks of atheism, meaning belief that God does not exist. A half dozen passages are worth considering, even if very briefly. The first appears in Philo's discussion of creation: "Moses teaches us also

many other things, and especially five most beautiful lessons which are superior to all others. In the first place, for the sake of convicting the atheists [*atheoi*], he teaches us that the Deity [*theios*] has a real being and existence" (*Creation* 170). In this context Philo speaks of two types of atheists. The first are those of "two minds," by which he means what we would probably call agnostics, that is, people who are not sure if God exists. But Philo also speaks of those who assert that the "Deity does not exist at all, but that it is a mere assertion of men obscuring the truth with myth and fiction" (ibid.). Here we have reference to true atheism in the philosophical sense.

Elsewhere Philo speaks critically of "the opinion which denies any god [*atheos*], and that which worships a multitude of gods . . . he who worships no god at all is barren, and he who worships a multitude is the son of a harlot" (*On the Migration of Abraham* 69). Indeed, according to Philo, "If you know it not, you are an atheist [*atheos*], and atheism [*atheotēs*] is the beginning of all iniquity" (*On the Decalogue* 91). In another context, Philo describes atheism, often associated with men who study philosophy, as "the greatest of all vices" (*On the Special Laws* 1.32). Later, he speaks disparagingly of those "who are utterly atheistic" (ibid. 1.334).

The last example to be considered is reminiscent of the charges brought against Socrates. Philo speaks of one Theodorus:

> It is said that Theodorus, who was surnamed the Atheist [*atheos*], when he was banished from Athens, and had come to the court of Lysimachus, when one of those in power there reproached him with his banishment, mentioning the cause of it too, namely, that he had been expelled because he had been condemned for atheism [*atheotēs*] and for corrupting the youth. (*That Every Good Person is Free* 127)

To advocate atheism, it is understood, is to corrupt society. This was the very accusation leveled against Socrates, for which the great philosopher was forced to drink hemlock (Plato, *Phaedo* 117a–118a).

We may infer from these passages that there were indeed individuals, probably mostly philosophers, known to Philo in Alexandria, Egypt, and probably elsewhere who openly advocated atheism. They were not especially influential, for there is little reaction to them and

no body of atheistic literature, if there ever was one, has survived. The language of atheism, that is, principally words like *atheos* and *atheotēs*, was utilized almost exclusively in reference to behavior and morals.

The word *atheos* appears but once in the writings that make up the New Testament. In his letter to the church of Ephesus Paul reminds the Gentile members: "[R]emember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God [*atheoi*] in the world" (Eph 2:12). In describing them in their pre-Christian life as *atheoi* ("without God") Paul does not imply that these Gentiles were atheists, that is, people who did not believe in God or in the gods. He simply means that they were estranged from the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus the Messiah.

The perspective presupposed in Eph 2:12 is not too different from what we observe in the book of Acts, where Paul addresses the men of Athens at Mars Hill: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:22–23). The men of Athens were very interested in gods and divinities, as seen by the numerous statues, temples, and inscriptions in and around the market place and the Acropolis. To underscore his point, Paul calls attention to the inscription that reads, "To an unknown god." Today visitors to the Acropolis and the market (or agora) that is situated at its foot can see the remains of many of these temples, inscriptions, and statues of various gods.

We should assume that the perspective of the Ephesians was essentially the same as that of the Athenians. That is to say, they were religious, they built and supported various temples, and they devoted themselves to a host of divinities. In short, they were, like the Athenians, "very religious" (Greek: *deisidaimonesteros* – "very [concerned with] divinities and spirits"), but they were nonetheless without God. The true God, the God of Israel and Father of Jesus the Messiah, was "unknown" to the people of Ephesus. Hence, in their pre-Christian existence these people were *atheoi*, "without God." In responding to the gospel they became acquainted with God and came

to share in the promises and covenants that God gave Israel long ago.

By the beginning of the second century, if not earlier, pagans were describing Christians as *atheoi*, "atheists," for denying the existence of the Greco-Roman gods. The charge was sometimes leveled against the Jews too in the first century and beyond (e.g., Apollonius Molon, *apud* Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.15; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 67.14.1–3; Julian the Apostate, *Against the Galileans* 43B). The accusation of atheism in large part justified the state's persecution of Christians.

Closely related to the denial of the gods was the refusal to confess Caesar as Lord or as divine. In the Roman world Caesar was regarded as divine, as in some sense a "son of god," and as high priest (*pontifex maximus*) who represented the people to the gods. Christians denied both the gods and the divinity of Caesar, which provoked the state and led to severe persecution and martyrdom.

Two of the earliest and best known Christian martyrs accused on the grounds of atheism — either denying the gods or denying the divinity of the emperor or denying both — were Ignatius (d. c. 110) and Polycarp (d. 155). In custody and on his way to Rome to stand trial Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in Syria, wrote letters to six churches and one letter to Polycarp. Eusebius tells us without providing details that Ignatius was taken to Rome and there was thrown to wild animals (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.36.1–15). In his letter to Polycarp (cf. ibid. 3.36.10) Ignatius writes, almost in passing, "our God (is) Jesus Christ" (*To Polycarp* 8:3). Such a confession implicitly contradicts the imperial doctrine, well attested on stone and papyrus, that Caesar is lord and god. In the latter part of the first century and on into the second century the Julio-Claudian emperors and the Flavian emperors were routinely called "lord," "god," and "son of god" (e.g., for Augustus, see *SB* 401, *BGU* 628; for Tiberius, see *SB* 8317; for Claudius, see *SB* 4331; for Nero, see P.Oxy. 1021; for Vespasian, see *SB* 1927; P.Oxy. 112; for Titus, see *SB* 1016; P.Oxy. 1028; for Domitian, see *SB* 2084, P.Oxy. 2186).[1] Their precedent-setting practice continued in the

[1] *SB* refers to F. Preisigke et al., eds., *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunde aus Ägypten* (Strassburg: K. J. Trübner, 1915–); *BGU* refers to *Ägyptische Urkunden in den staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: Griechische Urkunden*, vols. 1–9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895–1937); and P.Oxy. refers to B. P. Grenfell et al., eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1898–). Numbers refer to the numbering of the primary texts, not to page numbers.

second century under Trajan, Hadrian, and the Antonines.

It is interesting to observe that the language of atheism appears in one of the letters of Ignatius, though not in reference to Christians. In two places in his letter to the church of Tralles Ignatius speaks of the godless:

> I am sure that you agree with me regarding these matters, for I received a living example of your love and still have it with me in the person of your bishop, whose very demeanor is a great lesson and whose gentleness is his power; I think that even the godless [*atheoi*] respect him (*Trallians* 3:2).

Later in his letter, in reference to the Docetists who deny the reality of the bodily incarnation, Ignatius asks: "But if, as some atheists [*atheoi*], that is, unbelievers, say, he suffered in appearance only..., why am I in chains?" (ibid. 10:1). In the first passage Ignatius uses the word *atheos* as we have already seen many times. He has called pagans *atheoi* in the sense that they are "without God." We see this in other Christian writings (e.g., Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogos* 3.11.80; Ps.-Clement, *Homilies* 15.4; *Sibylline Oracles* 8:395).

But the meaning of *atheos* in the second passage in the letter to the Trallians is harder to determine. Its use is admittedly ambiguous, meaning either those who are without God or those who deny the very existence of God. If the latter was Ignatius's intent (and I suspect it was), then it represents a sharp polemical thrust, for Docetists believed in the existence of God. But to deny the reality of the incarnation was, in the mind of Ignatius and many other early Christians, tantamount to the denial of God and so in a sense could be called a form of atheism.

A few decades later Polycarp himself is faced with the prospects of martyrdom. As had Ignatius before him, Polycarp refuses to confess the divinity or lordship of the emperor. Standing before his judges he is asked:

> 'Why, what harm is there in saying, 'Caesar is Lord [*kurios kaisar*],' and offering incense' (and other words to this effect) 'and thereby saving yourself?' Now at first he gave them no answer. But when they persisted, he said: 'I am not about to do what you are suggesting to me' (*Mart. Poly.* 8:2).

Polycarp served in the mid-second century as the bishop of Smyrna in Asia Minor (Izmir in modern Turkey). His refusal to confess the divinity of the emperor, as well as his refusal to worship the gods of the Greeks and Romans, led to the charge of atheism. According to the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, written not long after the death of the bishop, we are told that the pagan multitude shouted against the Christians: "Away with the atheists [*atheoi*]! Find Polycarp!" (*Mart. Poly.* 3:2; the story is retold in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 4.15.6; cf. 4.15.18). When Polycarp is brought before the Roman proconsul, the latter demands: "Swear by the divinity [*tyche*] of Caesar" (*Mart. Poly.* 9:2; 10:1). Polycarp of course refuses (ibid. 9:1–3). The proconsul demands that Polycarp swear the oath to Caesar and revile Christ. His refusal to swear by the divinity of Caesar would have been interpreted as proof of the charge of atheism. In the trial that follows the crowds shout, "This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods [*ho tōn hēmeterōn theōn kathairetēs*], who teaches many not to sacrifice or worship" (ibid. 12:2). The bishop continues to refuse and so is executed.

The charge against Polycarp is quite remarkable. His refusal to worship the Greek and Roman gods, including veneration of the Roman emperor, is according to Roman belief tantamount to destroying the gods. To the extent that what is said here in an admittedly rhetorical and apologetic text truly reflects pagan thinking, one can see why the charge of atheism was taken so seriously in late antiquity.

However, there is more than rhetoric and apologetic in play. We know from Governor Pliny's letter to Emperor Trajan (*Epistles* 10.96; c. 111 AD) that pagan sacrifice and cultic activity in parts of Pontus (central Asia Minor) had all but ceased thanks to Christian influence. It is to this problem that the accusation that Polycarp "teaches many not to sacrifice or worship" refers. Ever since the days of Paul, the Christian movement in Asia had a significant impact on religious culture (cf. Acts 19:17–20).

From the mid-second century on pagans regularly accused Christians of atheism. In his *First Apology* (c. 155) Justin Martyr replies to this charge: "[W]e are called atheists [*atheoi*]," though at the same time conceding and explaining, that "we are atheists, so far as gods of (the

pagans) are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God" (*1 Apol.* 6.1). "What sober-minded man," Justin further argues, "will not acknowledge that we are not atheists [*atheoi*], worshipping as we do the Maker of this universe . . . " (ibid. 13.1). He adds further that "those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists [*atheoi*]" (ibid. 46.2). In his Second Apology (c. 161) Justin complains that Crescens the pagan philosopher unfairly describes Christians as "atheistic and impious [*atheōn kai asebōn*]" (*2 Apol.* 3; the story is retold in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 4.16.3). Tatian (c. 160) complains too that the Greeks exclude Christians "from civic rights as if we were the most godless [*atheōtatoi*] of men" (*Address to the Greeks* 27.1). Athenagoras (c. 177) devotes several chapters of his apology, in order to counter the charge that Christians are atheists (*Concerning the Christians* 4–30).

The accusations and counter-accusations of atheism in late antiquity rarely had anything to do with what we moderns understand as atheism. Jews, Christians, and pagans all believed in the existence of God or gods. A few pagans may well have entertained philosophical atheism, but they were very few and their atheism seems largely to have been a reaction to the crude and contradictory nature of much of the polytheism of their day.

The real atheism of late antiquity was practical atheism, the belief that God or the gods were indifferent to human affairs or that God or the gods simply did not or could not observe human behavior. The practical atheism of late antiquity is not unlike the atheism that is reflected, as we have seen, in a few of the ancient Hebrew scriptures. Although people believe in God, they often live as if God is not present. The person who thinks and lives like that, says the Psalter, is a fool.

By way of conclusion, what is worth noting is that the practical atheism of the biblical period and late antiquity is much like the atheism of today. Most of humanity believes that God exists, but much of humanity lives as though God does not exist or, if he does, he takes little interest in human affairs. The atheism of today is much more than what we see in writings and pronouncements of atheist celebrities, such as Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins. Atheism is much more than an explicit denial of the existence of God. The

atheism that should concern all who believe in God is the practical atheism reflected in the lives of many theists, including Christians. The fools are not limited to those who openly state, "There is no God"; they include those who profess belief in God but live as though he does not exist.

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God, Suffering, and the Atheist's Crutch

Michael Coren

I have spent more than three decades justifying and defending the Christian faith, not so much in academic circles but in the public square, in newspapers and on radio and television. It is both the pleasure and the pain of being a Christian journalist. We are all surely painfully familiar with the usual attacks — bad Christians, slavery, torture, Crusades, Holocaust, Inquisition, evolution and so on — but the one I still hear the most often is the old classic of why would a God who is all good, all knowing, and all powerful allow bad things to happen to good people. I tend to ask my audience to reverse the question: why would an all good, all knowing, and all powerful God allow good things to happen to bad people? After all, while seeing good people suffer is horrible, it is not much fun seeing evil people having fun. It has to be said, though, that this question is sometimes asked in all innocence, by people with a genuine desire to understand what seems impossible to understand. Or, it is asked by people who have themselves suffered or whose loved ones have known grief and loss. How could God let this happen to me and to mine, why would God not stop this pain and help me? At its most severe, it can be devastating; the abduction and murder of a child or a long and painful death of a kind and gentle person. The critic of Christianity would respond that God is either not all knowing, not all powerful, or not all good. Which, of course, implies that God exists in the first place. I would say that the question and even the problem are actually more of a difficulty and a conundrum for the non-believer than for the Christian.

I do not claim that my approach is the best one but I can assure you it has been effective. The materialist and the atheist, they who would deny God, believe that at death all is over. Life is finished, it is done and complete; we are dust, mere food for worms. To these people, pain has no meaning at all other than what it is: pure, unadulterated suffering, without any redeeming purpose. There may to the atheist be a certain formless heroism attached to the person who faces suffering with courage and without complaining, but if we are all body and flesh, and no soul and spirit, if we are mere products of a selfish gene and nothing more, one wonders why this heroism would in any way be significant. There is, though, a greater point, and that is that the atheist is convinced that these years we spend on Earth — perhaps 80 or 90 if we are lucky, and only a handful if we are not — are everything we have, and constitute the total human experience. Christians, on the other hand, believe that these years on Earth, while important and to be used wisely and also to be enjoyed, are a preparation for a far greater life to come. They are, in effect, a thin ray of light from the great sunshine that is eternity and life in heaven with God. My end, as Mary Queen of Scots had it, is my beginning. And her end was at the sharp point of an axe, as she was beheaded on the orders of Queen Elizabeth. Queen Mary was certain that there was an existence beyond that on earth, as have been myriad Christians since the time of Christ. While it is neurotic rather than Christian to welcome suffering, and no intelligent and comprehending Christian would welcome suffering for its own sake, the Bible actually makes it quite clear that faith in Jesus Christ and in Christianity does not guarantee a good life but a perfect eternity. Indeed there is more prediction in Scripture of a struggle and perhaps a valley of fear on Earth for the believer than there is of gain and success. There may be Christian sects that promise material wealth and all sorts of triumphs in exchange for faith but this is a non-Christian, even an anti-Christian bargain, and has never been something that mainstream and orthodox Christianity would affirm. Christians believe that this life on earth is only the land of shadows and that real life has not yet begun. So yes, bad things happen to good people.

Some might argue that Christian belief is merely an excuse to escape the harshness of reality, but that is no more reasonable than arguing

that atheism is a mere excuse to escape the harsh reality of judgment, and the thought of an eternity spent without and away from God. The more important point, though, is that the oft-repeated criticism that bad things happen to good people says nothing at all about God, but everything about human beings. Pain may not be desirable, but it is only a feeling, as is joy. Yet pain is not mere suffering, but also a warning sign and a way to protect us against danger. That something may hurt is undeniable, and that we will all feel some sort of pain at some point is inevitable, but whether this pain is our doing or God's is something entirely different. The all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good God allows us to suffer, just as he allows us all sorts of things, because we have the freedom to behave as we will. But he has also provided a place with the greatest contentment we can imagine if only we listen to him, listen to his Son, and listen to his church. As to the specific issue of pain and suffering, C. S. Lewis, who watched his beloved wife die of cancer, put it this way: "But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." God's plan is for us to return to him, and to lead the best possible life on earth; sometimes we need to be reminded of our purpose, and pain is a sharp, clear tool to achieve that purpose. A needle may be necessary to prevent disease or infection; nobody welcomes or enjoys the injection, but it prevents a far greater suffering, just as what may seem like even intolerable pain now will lead to far greater happiness later.

Lewis also wrote:

> By the goodness of God we mean nowadays almost exclusively His lovingness . . . by Love, in this context, most of us mean kindness — the desire to see others than the self happy; not happy in this way or in that, but just happy. What would really satisfy us would be a God who said of anything we happened to like doing, 'What does it matter so long as they are contented?' We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven — a senile benevolence who, as they say, 'liked to see young people enjoying themselves' and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, 'a good time was had by all.'

Today this applies far more obviously even than when Lewis was working and writing — he died in 1963. If I want something, runs the modern idiom — and I experience this reaction almost every time I speak or write — I need something; and if I need something, thus I must have something. To the Christian, however, God knows our needs better than we do, and also knows that our wants and our needs are distinctly different phenomena. Which leads to the challenge of why God would allow us to go and do wrong, and to want something that is not necessarily to our eternal advantage, or even to our immediate good.

We have freedom, and we have free will. We have that free will because God, according to the Christian, is love, and no lover would allow anything else. A man who locks his wife away in a room, even if he does so for what he believes to be motives of kindness and devotion, is not a lover but an abuser, and a parent who is so protective of a child that the youngster is never allowed to leave the house will, even for what they consider the best of reasons, cause untold psychological damage to that young person. I always remember when our first child, a son, was around twelve years old, and attended a school a few miles from where we lived. We had driven him to school each day, but it was now time for him to take public transportation. We worried about letting him go off alone in the crowded and, frankly, sometimes dangerous big city. But it was time, it was the right time. Off he went. And there was me, waiting at the end of the day, sitting by the door, anxious to see him come home. When he did — totally ignoring me beyond a perfunctory teenage grunt of acknowledgement — which is the way it ought to be, I was so incredibly happy and relieved. My wife and I had to let him go, but we were so relieved when he returned. Imagine, then, how God feels when we return home to him. He lets us go, he sets us free, he acts as a loving father does, but he so much wants us home again. I was so happy when my son came home. That God allows us freedom, and sometimes a freedom to disobey, says everything about God's love for us, and nothing against it.

Yet while he wants us to return to him, he cannot force us to take this course of action, and if we choose an eternity without him what we have chosen is Hell. This is important, because a lot of people

purposely or accidentally misunderstand the concept. Hell is not so much a place of punishment, as a place where we do not know and do not see God. We are creatures made in his image, made to love him and to be loved by him, and our vocation after this sojourn on earth is to be united with our maker in heaven. But we have a choice. We have freedom, we have the right to choose, even the right to choose to do the wrong thing. God in his ultimate love even gives us the right to choose not to return to him, and to choose to spend eternity without him, in a place we call Hell. So, atheists scream at a God in whom they do not believe, for allowing them to reject him in whom they do not believe, for allowing them to spend the rest of time in a place without him in whom they do not believe. It is all a little odd and contradictory. The pain that must occur in heaven when we reject God and choose to live in a Godless place, is beyond our comprehension, but this freedom of choice proves God's love and not his indifference.

Nor is it the case that he makes himself invincibly difficult to find, which leads to the accusation that a truly good God would make it easier, even inevitable and unavoidable, that we would all follow him and find our way to heaven. But this reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of God's involvement and intervention in history, and – again — of what choice is all about, and how intimate love and choice always have to be. If he made himself entirely obvious, only a fool or a masochist would purposely reject him, and he would effectively be giving us no choice at all. Intimidating as it may seem, we are also being tested, and judged — and judgment is the last thing that modern, western humanity is willing to be subjected to. But remember that that same modern, western person often complains about fairness, or lack of the same. It would be horribly unfair if anybody and everybody, irrespective of their choices, spent eternity in joy and completeness with God in heaven. So the same people who complain about bad things happening to good people would now loudly protest that it was wrong that such good things — actually the best things possible — happen to bad people, some of them the worst people possible. If he made himself almost impossible to find, God would be playing cruel games with us and would be loveless, like some supreme vivisectionist, possessing power but showing no affection and without any responsibility. So he makes himself entirely

recognizable and attainable if we have the slightest inclination to find him. He sent us monarchs, prophets, martyrs, signs and symbols, miracles, and finally his son, to die in agony for us and then through the resurrection proved God's love, power, and being. Not a bad set of clues when you think about it. If you think about it. But you do, yes, have to think about it.

So why do people think about it? Seriously, why do people think so much about God, including those who claim to hate him, or more commonly, to be indifferent to him? Like the little boy in the classroom who pulls the little girl's hair, ostensibly because he does not like her or does not care about her. Actually, as we know, he thinks about her all the time, because in his little, unformed, and charmingly immature way, he loves her. I have often wondered why there are so many books written by atheists, so many television programs made, and so many words expressed. If he does not exist, if there is no God, it would surely be more sensible and logical to spend your time writing and obsessing about something else, perhaps about something that does exist. But, they might counter, we need to say so much and so often because we need to help and liberate the other people (atheists often feel the need to educate all of the people they think to be stupid and beneath them), because those other people are ignorant of the truth. These wretched people, insist the atheists, have invented God because they are weak and needy. Well, it could be true. Sure, God could be an invention, concocted by the weak and needy to help them though their sad lives. Then again, the absence of God, the non-existence of God could be an invention. It could be something invented by scared and threatened people who are too weak and needy to follow his laws and are terrified of his judgment. British playwright Tom Stoppard, not known for being a Christian or for defending God or faith, wrote in his usual pithy and delightful way that, "Atheism is a crutch for those who cannot bear the reality of God"; while the strongly Christian novelist and children's author George Macdonald wrote in the nineteenth century with great insight, "How often we look upon God as our last and feeblest resource! We go to him because we have nowhere else to go. And then we learn that the storms of life have driven us, not upon the rocks, but into the desired haven."

It is only one set of responses to one set of questions. But I guarantee that if we scrape away the anger of the Bill Maher types, the intellect of the Richard Dawkins types and the sheer ignorance — forgive me — of the usual college student types, it all comes down to one simple moan. I defy or deny God, therefore I am. Nothing new there, nothing new at all.

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"Prove to Me That God Exists"

Getting Clear on Atheism, Agnosticism, & a Few Other Matters

Paul Copan

After speaking to the Philomathean Society—a debate club—at Union College in Schenectady, New York, a student approached me and demanded: "Prove to me that God exists."

I asked him, "What would you take as an acceptable level of proof?"

The student paused and eventually responded, "I guess I haven't even thought about that."

The conversation, which turned out to be cordial enough, died out shortly thereafter.

Usually, when skeptics ask us Christians for "proof," they are usually calling for "*scientific* proof" for God's existence, objective moral values, the soul, or life after death. We have come to expect such challenges in an age of *scientism*—the belief that science, and thus "scientific proof," can alone yield knowledge. Since the 9/11 attacks, this "enlightened" modern criterion for knowing has been reinforced by the "New Atheists"—Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and (the late) Christopher Hitchens. Richard Dawkins, for example, writes: "Scientific beliefs are supported by evidence, and they get results. Myths and faiths are not and do not."[1]

Such critics assume that Christians and other theists have a special burden of proof to bear to show that God exists. All the while, atheists may be sitting back and assessing whatever the theist

[1] Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 33.

can come up with. And if nothing is forthcoming or if it is not sufficiently strong evidence to their mind, then they typically think themselves properly justified in their rejection of God. But is that the proper protocol demanded by rationality and other appropriate considerations?

In response to such challenges, it is wise to sort out and define our terms. What do we mean by *science*? What is *knowledge*? What is the difference between an *atheist* and an *agnostic*? We should also get clear on "the rules of engagement" so that we can fair-mindedly converse about such topics.

SCIENCE, SCIENTISM, AND KNOWLEDGE

First, let us clear away some confusions about *science* and *knowledge*. To do so, we should distinguish between *science* and *scientism*. As Christian philosopher of science Del Ratzsch defines *science*, it is the attempted objective study of the natural world and natural phenomena whose theories and explanations do not normally depart from the natural world.[2]

Now, some will quibble with the word "normally." This, they suggest, "smuggles God into science." But to think this is a mistake. To insist that all that happens in the *physical* world demands a *physical* explanation is question-begging—that is, assuming what one wants to prove. But if God exists and has created and designed the universe, it would be quite fitting for him to act directly in the world according to his good and wise purposes. What's more, God's acts in the world would in principle leave detectable traces of such activity on or in the physical world—whether the Big Bang, the universe's fine-tuning, or miracles like turning water into wine. For example, Craig Keener's two-volume book *Miracles* is a work that provides massive documentation for these physical traces—for example, healings and resuscitations from death carried out in Jesus's name. Keener mentions possessing the actual x-rays from before and immediately after a number of these prayers for healing.[3] So while *most* things that

[2] Del Ratzsch, *Philosophy of Science* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 15.
[3] Craig Keener, *Miracles*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011). For further documented miracle accounts, see chapter 7 in J.P. Moreland, *Kingdom Triangle* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

happen in the physical world have physical explanations, to demand *only* physical explanations for any physical phenomena actually goes beyond science to the rigid demands of scientism that presupposes that the physical world is all there is (i.e., naturalism). In the interests of pursuing truth, shouldn't we be looking for the *best* explanation for a physical event—whether natural or supernatural—and not necessarily the best *natural* explanation?

In the movie version of Dr. Seuss's *Horton Hears a Who*, the kangaroo insists that Horton the elephant is wrong about life on a tiny speck of dust. Exasperated at Horton's belief in such small persons, the kangaroo pontificates in a naturalistic sort of way: "If you can't see, hear, or feel something, it doesn't exist!" Scientism declares that we can only know through scientific observation.[4] But notice: this is a *philosophical* assumption; it is *not* the result of scientific observation or research. It is a statement *about* science, not a statement *of* science. But how does one actually *know* that science alone yields knowledge? Or to put it another way, *How can you scientifically prove that all knowledge must be scientifically provable?* The "always prove it scientifically" demand is a self-contradictory one.

Let us shift things a bit to what *knowledge* itself is. Cutting through a good deal of debate, we can say that knowledge has three components: it is (1) a *belief* that is (2) *true* and (3) has *warrant* (or, others might say, *justification*): *warranted true belief*. Now, essential to knowledge is that a belief be *true*. So I cannot rightly say, "I *know* that the earth is flat" or "I *know* that circles are square." You can *believe* false propositions or statements, but you cannot *know* them. *Truth* is bound up with *knowledge*. Furthermore, knowledge requires that a true belief have warrant—or something that turns a true belief into knowledge. To have an *accidentally* true belief is not knowledge. To have a lucky hunch that turns out to be true is not knowledge. Or let us say you conclude that it is 2:12 by looking at a clock in a store window; it turns out that you are correct, but only *coincidentally*: in actuality, the clock *is not* working! The belief that it is 2:12 in this case does not count as knowledge either.

Now since the time of René Descartes (1596-1650), a highly-

[4] Scientism's *weaker* version says that science is the *best* way to know, but it is usually articulated in the *stronger* version.)

rigorous but pernicious definition of knowledge has come to infect the modern mind—namely, that *knowledge requires 100 percent certainty*.[5] So if it is "logically possible" that you could be wrong, then you do not *really* know. So many people turn out to be so tentative about what can rightly be called "knowledge." But following such a rigid, absolute standard is silliness. Indeed, no one but God could live up to it! But no credible epistemologist (a philosopher who specializes in the study of knowledge) accepts this "100 percent knowledge" myth. One major reason for that is this: *you cannot know with 100 percent certainty that knowledge requires 100 percent certainty*. Furthermore, we can truly know lots of things that do not rise to this level of absolute confidence. For example, you know that a world independent of your mind exists—even though it is logically possible it is just an illusion—*maya*, as the Advaita Vedanta Hindu would call it. So let us say that this logical possibility bumps down the "certainty level" to 97 percent. Does this mean you cannot really know that the external world exists? Well, how does the "100 percenter" know that we cannot *really* know the world outside our minds exists? The fact is, we know a lot of things with confidence, even if not with complete certainty. Indeed, there would be precious little we could know if we followed that demanding standard.

When it comes to the knowledge of God's existence, the theist does not have to live up to Descartes' absolute standards. The believer can have plenty of *good reasons* for belief in God—even if not absolute, mathematically-certain ones. A helpful way to make a reasoned case for God's existence is to ask, *Which context makes the best sense of important features of the universe and of human existence?* For example, we are aware of the existence of consciousness, free will or a presumed personal responsibility, personhood, rationality, duties, and human value—not to mention the beginning, fine-tuning, and beauties of the universe. These are hardly surprising if a good, personal, conscious, rational, creative, powerful, and wise God exists. However, these phenomena are quite *startling* or *shocking* if they are the result of deterministic, valueless, non-conscious, unguided, non-rational material processes. We have every reason to think a naturalistic world would *not* yield these phenomena—though not so

[5] Descartes' criteria for a belief-acceptance are "self-evident," "incorrigible," and "evident to the senses." Of course, these criteria are not self-evident, incorrigible, nor evident to the senses.

with theism—and many naturalists themselves register surprise and even astonishment that such features should appear in a materialistic, deterministic universe.[6]

THEISM, ATHEISM, AND AGNOSTICISM

A number of years ago, I was speaking at an open forum at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (Massachusetts). After I completed my lecture, one student stood up and confidently proclaimed: "The reason I'm an atheist is that there aren't any good reasons to believe in God." I told him, "You should be an agnostic then. After all, it's possible that God exists even if no good reasons for his existence are available to us." I then proceeded to ask what kind of agnostic he was.

This brings us to our second set of terms to clarify—*theism, atheism,* and *agnosticism*—and we should also tackle the question of who bears the burden of proof in the face of these conflicting views.

No doubt about it, the *theist* makes a truth claim in asserting that *God exists*—a maximally great, worship-worthy being. So the theist, who makes a claim to know something, should bear a burden of proof. How is this belief justified? But does this mean that the atheist and agnostic are not making a claim? This would be an incorrect assumption.

Let us consider the atheist for a moment. Michael Scriven, a self-proclaimed *atheist* philosopher, has actually mislabeled himself. He insists: "we need not have a proof that God does not exist in order to justify atheism. Atheism is obligatory in the absence of any evidence for God's existence."[7] He adds that the concept of *God* and the notion of *Santa Claus* equally share the status of being "unreal" because there is no evidence for either of them.[8]

There are at least five problems with Scriven's claims. The first is that *he has incorrectly defined atheism*. The late prominent philosopher Antony Flew—an atheist who came to believe in God toward the end of

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[6] For more on this, see Paul Copan, "The Naturalists Are Declaring the Glory of God: Discovering Natural Theology in the Unlikeliest Places," in *Philosophy and the Christian Worldview: Analysis, Assessment and Development*, eds. David Werther & Mark D. Linville (New York: Continuum, 2012), 50-70; Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser, *The Rationality of Belief* (London: Routledge, 2003); Paul Copan, *Loving Wisdom: Christian Philosophy of Religion* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007); William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012).

[7] Michael Scriven, Primary Philosophy (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 102.

[8] Ibid., 103.

his life—defined atheism as "rejection of belief in God."[9] Then there's the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967), which defines an "atheist" as one who "maintains that there is no God, that is, that the sentence 'God exists' expresses a *false* proposition."[10] Atheist philosopher, Julian Baggini, defines atheism as "the belief that there is no God or gods."[11] The fact is, the standard definition of atheism is the *rejection* of belief in God/gods. The implication is clear: if atheism makes the knowledge-claim that *God does not exist*, this stance is in just as much need of justification as the theist's claim, *God exists*. Both bear the burden of proof since both make claims.

Second, *Scriven's description does not allow for any distinction between atheism and agnosticism.* So what is the difference? The *agnostic does not know* whether God exists or not. Let's say the agnostic believes that evidence for God is *completely* lacking *and* that the evidence favoring atheism is also completely lacking. Why not take the *opposite* tack of Scriven here? Why not say instead that, in the absence of evidence for *atheism* ("God does not exist"), one should become a *theist*?

We could add that if both the atheist and the agnostic hold that evidence for God is lacking, how does Scriven distinguish between these two positions? According to his proposal, agnosticism would turn out to be *identical* to atheism. However, such a confusion of categories does not exist if we take the standard understanding of atheism as *disbelief* in God—not simply *unbelief*, which would properly describe the agnostic. Of course, an agnostic might—and typically does—say that *some* evidence for God does exist, but that the some, roughly equally-weighty evidence against God prevents her from belief in God. But this is beside the point here. Scriven's understanding of atheism is both uninformative and inconsistent.

Third, *the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.* As I noted earlier, if evidence for God is lacking, the more logical conclusion to draw would be agnosticism. After all, it is *possible* that God exist even if evidence for God were nowhere to be found. In this case, we should *suspend* belief, which would amount to mere *un*belief, but, as we have seen, that is different from *dis*belief (i.e., atheism). Why think we are

[9] Antony Flew, *Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 28.
[10] Paul Edwards, ed., "Atheism," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 1:175.
[11] Julian Baggini, *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.

obligated to *dis*believe?

Fourth, *what if belief in God is "properly basic," even without supporting evidence?* Some Christian philosophers like Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff have argued that we commonly believe many things *without evidence or arguments*—for example, that other minds exist or that the universe is older than fifteen minutes. Why could we not say the same about God's existence—that it is "properly basic"? In other words, when our minds are functioning properly and directed toward the truth, then convincing or firm belief about God's existence could simply naturally arise out of this experience. These philosophers—they are called "Reformed epistemologists"—do not deny that there is evidence for God's existence, only that evidence is not required for belief in God to be rational.[12]

Now, we could claim that belief in other minds or a universe older than fifteen minutes is just part of our commonsense, everyday experience *and thus is itself evidence*. So such basic experiences serve as evidence, even if this evidence has not been produced through rock-solid formal arguments. But if these Reformed epistemologists are correct, then we can speak of a warranted belief in God without argument or evidence.

Fifth, *to claim God and Santa Claus are on the same level is a flawed comparison.* We have strong evidence that Santa Claus does *not* exist. We know where Christmas gifts come from. We know that humans—let alone, elves—do not live at the North Pole. We can be pretty confident that a human Santa, if he existed, would be mortal rather than ageless and undying. This is evidence *against* Santa. By contrast, we *do* have evidence for God's existence—the beginning and fine-tuning of the universe, consciousness, rationality, beauty, human dignity and worth, free will. The evidence for God is on a different level altogether.

In light of these points, we should bring in another important distinction. There are two kinds of agnostic: (1) the *ordinary* agnostic, who says, "I would really like to know whether God exists or not, but I do not have enough to go on"; and (2) the *ornery* (!) agnostic, who says, "I do not know whether God exists or not—and *you* cannot know either." The latter—the hard-nosed or militant agnostic—makes the sweeping claim that *no one* can know God exists. Notice that the militant agnostic

[12] For a discussion, see Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1983), 27.

is also making a knowledge-claim. Again, it stands in just as much need of justification as that of the atheist's or the theist's respective claims. While this brand of agnostic may not know God exists, why insist that *no one else* can know? What if God reveals himself in a powerful, though private, way to someone—say, at a burning bush or in a vision in her bedroom? Even if the evidence for such encounters is not publicly accessible to the hard-nosed agnostic, the theist persuaded about God's existence through such encounters is warranted in that belief, and the agnostic could not fairly rule out such possibilities.

As mentioned earlier, evidence for God's existence is widely available through creation, conscience, rationality, and human experience. What is more, the biblical faith—unlike other traditional religions—is checkable; it opens itself up to public scrutiny. If, for example, Christ has not been raised from the dead, the Christian faith would be false, Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 15. Indeed, the Scriptures routinely emphasize the role of eyewitnesses, the importance of public signs and wonders to prompt belief (Jn. 20:30-31), and other historical evidences for all to consider.

While we can have *rational* reasons for belief in God, let us not forget ample *practical* or *existential* reasons for considering God. That is, the fulfillment of our deepest human longings is found in God. This is a theistic support the skeptic frequently overlooks. Our longing for identity, security, and significance, our desire for immortality and hope beyond the grave, our seeking forgiveness of our guilt and the removal of shame, or our longing for cosmic justice—all of these yearnings are fulfilled by God in Christ, who has placed eternity in our hearts (Ecc. 3:11). If we are made for a filial relationship with God, why should such longings be discounted? What is wrong with significance and security or overcoming the fear of death? Actually, we would be wise to consider these reasons—in additional to rational reasons—since we bear God's image, which goes beyond mere human rational experience to a broad array of perfectly proper considerations.

FAITH AND EVIDENCE, KNOWLEDGE, AND IGNORANCE

Where then does this leave the *ordinary* agnostic? Here we must

make further distinctions. "Is the ordinary agnostic *innocent* in his ignorance of God, or is his a *culpable* ignorance?" When I was in Moscow back in 2002, I took a picture of the "changing of the guard" at the tomb of the unknown soldier at the Kremlin wall. To do so, I stepped on the grass, and, knowing sufficient Russian, I saw no posted signs prohibiting my doing so. But a security guard whisked me away from the scene, insisting that I had done something terribly wrong—and probably hoping for a bribe. After asking me about my formal education, he exclaimed, "You're a philosopher, and you do don't know you shouldn't step on the grass?" This truly was a case of *innocent* ignorance on my part.

Now what if I am speeding down the highway but not paying attention to the signs? If the highway patrol stops me, I could not say, "I am innocent; I did not seen the sign." My ignorance would be *culpable* since I have an obligation to pay attention to speed limit signs. I am afraid many people who claim ignorance about God's existence are more like *apatheists*, who *do not care* whether God exists. Sadly, they devote their lives to all kinds of pursuits—Facebook, movie-watching, luxury cruises, golfing—but do not devote their mental powers to seriously contemplate the most significant question of all, namely, God's existence. Why should God reveal himself to the morally and spiritually lazy and apathetic?

And why should he reveal himself to the proud and arrogant, who demand that God "prove himself" through divine pyrotechnics (Mt. 16:4)? Would that really produce genuine conversion and deep love for God? After all, the Israelites had plenty of signs—the ten plagues, the parted Red Sea, manna every morning, the constant presence of a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. Yet most of the Israelites died in unbelief after displays of idolatry, rebellion, and murmuring (1 Cor. 10:1-13). Evidence—even a person's rising from the dead—does not guarantee trust in God (Lk. 16:31). God is interested in more than our justified true belief that he exists. Even the demons are solid monotheists (Jas. 2:19). The more pressing question is: Are we willing to know and be known by God, to submit to God as the Cosmic Authority?

To seek God with all our heart is fundamental to God's revealing himself to us (Jer. 29:13). As the philosopher Blaise Pascal put it:

> willing to appear openly to those who seek Him with all their heart, and to be hidden from those who flee from Him with all their heart, He so regulates the knowledge of Himself that He has given signs of Himself, visible to those who seek Him, and not to those who seek Him not. There is enough light for those who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition.[13]

Beyond this, God may have certain reasons for veiling himself—to encourage greater trust and perseverance, deepened character, and so on. He reveals himself on his own terms.

SUMMARY THOUGHTS

In matters theistic, atheistic, and agnostic, we should be careful to define our terms. This includes an awareness of what counts for knowledge and ignorance. We have seen that *atheism*—the belief that God does not exist—is not the default position. The atheist, theist, and hard-nosed agnostic each make a claim, and this claim must be justified rather than assumed. *Each* bears the burden of proof—not just the theist. And even the ordinary agnostic may simply be an "apatheist" and thus would be culpably ignorant. Evidence is available and God is willing to reveal himself, but evidence—without humility of heart—will not yield the genuine trust and commitment God desires.

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[13] *Pensées* (Eng. *Thoughts*), #430.

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Thoughts on Atheism and Relativism

Stephen T. Davis

I

Let us stipulate that the word "God" means a unique, all-powerful, all-knowing, and loving creator of the heavens and the earth. So theists are people who believe that God exists and atheists are people who believe that God does not exist. Despite being a theist myself, I believe that atheism can be a rational position. But in this essay I will try to explain why I think atheism is rational but mistaken.

But first let me admit that atheism has some real advantages over theism.

1. If you are an atheist, you do not ever have to worry about what God thinks of you or of what you do. This is a real advantage. Atheists do not have to be ethical people if they do not want to be. Now I am not saying that all atheists, or even atheists as a rule, are less ethical than theists. What I am saying is that theists consider that everything they do is under the evaluative scrutiny of a God who wants them to behave in certain ways and not in others, and that atheists never need worry about that sort of thing. Since there is no God to judge you here and now or to punish you in the afterlife, you can play golf instead of worship God if you want to. You can cheat on your income tax or even on your spouse if you can get away with it. You do not have to help unfortunate people if you prefer not to do so.

2. If you are an atheist, you do not ever have to admit that you need the help of a higher being. That is, atheists can take the attitude that it is up to them, and not God, to make it through life. They do not need the crutch of religion. Religion, they can say, is for the weak, for those who cannot make it on their own, for those who need the help of clergy, ritual, sacred texts, and God. In short, atheists can be autonomous; they can run their own lives. They do not ever have to lower their self-esteem by going to God or religion for help.
3. If you are an atheist, you can embrace any moral point of view that you want, even moral relativism. Theists hold, and must hold as part of their world view, that certain things are morally right and other things are morally wrong, whatever anybody may think. We call this notion *moral objectivism*; it is the theory that some normative ethical statements are objectively true and others objectively false. *Moral relativism*, on the other hand, is the theory that the truth or falsity of any normative ethical statement depends on what you think is morally right or wrong. Morality is relative to individuals; if you think murder *is* morally right then murder is morally right, but only for you. The person who thinks that murder is morally wrong is also right—for her.

My point then is that atheists are free to embrace ethical relativism if they want. I am not saying that all atheists are relativists; the point is that their worldview allows them that possibility. And the advantage here is that if you are a relativist, you can embrace any moral point of view that appeals to you. Indeed, you will be right in embracing it (right for you, that is).

Notice that all three of the advantages of atheism that I just listed explicitly concern what I will call pride. The word "pride" can be used in different ways. In some senses, it is not pejorative, as for example in the sentence, "People should take pride in their work." Here it means something like self-respect or perhaps a legitimate sort of self-esteem arising, say, from one's accomplishments or at least from a desire that they be worthy of respect. But in other uses, the word does have pejorative connotations, especially where a sort of egotism or self-conceit is involved, as for example in the sentence, "Pride goes before a fall."

Christian theologians have often held that pride in this second sense is the origin and root of all wrongdoing. In this case, pride is held to be an arrogant assumption of superiority, a refusal to bow the knee in obedience to God. I was just saying that three advantages of atheism are that you need never worry about how God evaluates what you do, you need never admit that you require God's help, and you can follow whatever moral code you want. It follows, then, that those who instead set out to love and obey God are abandoning pride. They are admitting that they were created by God, that they owe their existence to God, that they must call upon God for grace, mercy, and answers to prayer, and that they live under the moral requirement of honoring God in their lives.

What is it that keeps people from God? Obviously, some folk are atheists because they were raised in that way by their parents. Others have known religious believers who were cruel or dishonest or hypocritical. Others are concerned about great evils historically committed by the church—its support, for example, of anti-Semitism, the oppression of women, or slavery. In academic communities, one frequently encounters the assumption that intellectual difficulties constitute the main problem. And there is no doubt that such factors are significant. But Christianity teaches that pride is the deepest reason for rejecting God. People do not want to admit that they need the guidance or protection or forgiveness of God. There is even an argument against the existence of God that I think is convincing to very many people today. Let's call it the Lifestyle Argument Against the Existence of God. It's a simple argument, a two-step proof:

(1) I am not living and do not want to live the kind of life that God would want me to live if God existed;

(2) Therefore, God does not exist.

Now the Lifestyle Argument is obviously absurdly fallacious as a piece of logic. But, in my opinion, that does not prevent people from being influenced by it.

II

But rather than try to reply to atheistic arguments, I am going to take a different tack. I am going to try to mount an argument in

favor of belief in God. It is based upon some further thoughts about moral relativism. My argument comes in two steps. First, I will try to convince you that moral relativism should be rejected. Second, I will try to convince you that moral objectivism requires God.

So here is the first step in my argument. There is a deep incoherence in most versions of epistemological relativism. We see it most clearly in the attempt to argue that nothing is objectively true. The very claim, "Nothing is objectively true," is certainly pushed by many relativists as if *it* were objectively true. Thus their theory is self-refuting, like the position of the person who says, "I am unable to speak." And if relativists deny that the statement "Nothing is objectively true" is meant to be objectively true, i.e., if they insist it is merely their own perspective on things, that immediately raises the question why those of us who think that there *are* objective truths should take their idea seriously.

One contemporary version of epistemological relativism claims that we all view reality through the lenses of our own particular social setting (which of course is true), and that our language, gender, race, and class membership make objective or impartial assessment of reality impossible (which does not follow). But, again, that theory faces an obvious problem—how can we be sure that we have not been biased by our social location in marking the very claim that our social location always distorts our ability to assess reality?

Let me now talk about moral relativism. If there are no objective values but only good and bad "for you" and good and bad "for me," there is no rational basis for defending the ideals and accomplishments of human civilization at its best. These would be achievements like the equality of all people before the law, government as based on the consent of the people, tolerance of and civility toward those who disagree with us, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion. If there are no objective values, then the only available goals are the targets of one's own desires and the only available vehicles for convincing people are power and politics.

And here is the second step in my argument. It is to the effect that objective moral values require God. But first I want to be clear what I am not claiming. I am not denying that atheists can be morally good people. I know many who are. I am not saying that atheists cannot

know what is right and wrong. Of course many of them do. I am not saying that atheists cannot make moral decisions. Of course they can. I am not saying that atheists cannot formulate a good ethical system. They can do that.

I am saying that only if God exists is there a secure rational basis for objective right and wrong, for moral accountability, and for moral obligations.[1] God's holy and perfectly morally good nature constitutes the objective standard of right and wrong and is the source of moral values; and God's commands to human beings constitute the source of moral obligation. In the Christian faith, the essence of morality is the two-fold commandment that we (1) love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and strength, and (2) love our neighbor as ourselves.

But if there is no God, morality is a human invention or a by-product of biological and cultural evolution, and is accordingly entirely subjective and relativistic. Morals are either expressions of personal taste or else devices to help us adapt and thrive as organisms. But just so that you know that I am not making all of this up out of whole cloth, let me share with you quotations from two contemporary atheist thinkers. Max Horkheimer, a twentieth century German philosopher from the so-called Frankfort school of philosophy, wrote, "to salvage an unconditioned meaning [that is, one that stands out as an unqualified good] without God is a futile undertaking."[2] And Kai Nielsen, the famous Canadian atheist philosopher, at the end of an essay called "Why Should I Be Moral?," somewhat ruefully admits that:

> We have not been able to show that reason requires the moral point of view, or that all really rational persons should not be individual egoists or classical amoralists. Reason doesn't decide here. The picture I have painted for you is not a pleasant one. Reflection on it depresses me…Pure practical reason, even with a good knowledge of the facts, will not take you to morality.[3]

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[1] The argumentation of this section is largely borrowed from William Lane Craig, "The Indispensability of Theological Meta-Ethical Foundations for Morality."

[2] Cited in Richard Wolin, "Juergen Habermas and Post-Secular Societies," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 29, 2005), B17.

[3] Kai Nielsen, "Why Should I Be Moral?," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 21 (1984): 90.

I agree with Nielsen. Apart from God, there is no good reason for me to do the morally good thing in cases where I can benefit from doing the wrong thing and can do it with impunity. If morality is just a function of where the human race has evolved thus far, this seems a flimsy basis for the affirmation of such values as the worth and dignity of all people, their equality before the law, the need to treat people as ends in themselves and not just means to other ends, and the duty to do the moral thing even in situations where you can get away with doing what is immoral.

If I am right that objective moral values and obligations only exist if God exists, then there are two choices. You can opt for atheism and some kind of evolutionary and relativistic meta-ethical theory or you can opt for theism and for objective moral values. If you are someone who thinks, for example, that torturing babies just for the fun of it is objectively morally wrong, even if there are perverted sadists who think it is okay, and even if (God forbid!) such perverted sadists became the majority, then that, I say, is a good reason for you to believe in God.

III

Let me close with some thoughts about why I am not an atheist, i.e., why I believe in God. I will mention three reasons. First, I believe in God for the historical reason that my parents believed in God and taught me to do the same. But since many people grow up to reject opinions held by their parents, I should add the important phrase, "and I have never encountered any convincing reason to reject belief in God."

Like everybody else, I have listened over the years to very many reasons that atheists give against God, but I have never found any of them to be convincing. There are of course serious anti-theistic arguments that theists must think about and treat carefully, but I think many of them I amount to sheer ranting or even hand waving. They are often of the form, "After all, everybody knows that _____" or "Of course every intelligent person today realizes that _____." Richard Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion* (2006), for example, is full of more bluster than argumentation, and when he

gets to using arguments, they are usually painfully weak.

Second, I believe in God because I have had experiences that I naturally find myself interpreting in terms of the presence of God in my life. I have experienced what I take to be God's protection, God's guidance, God's mercy, and God's challenges. These experiences are important aspects of my life.

But both these reasons are, as we might say, subjective. Nobody else feels any need to accept what my parents taught me and nobody else has experienced my encounters with God. Accordingly, you might wonder whether I am able to give any "objective" evidence for God—an argument, perhaps. Yes, I can, although I can only briefly suggest it. I'll call it the genocide argument.

Let me define genocide as the crime of intentionally destroying or trying to destroy an entire group of people, usually a racial, ethnic, national, or religious group. My argument presupposes moral objectivism, i.e., the theory that certain things are morally right (things like compassion, truth-telling, and promise-keeping) and that certain other things (things like lying, cruelty, and murder) are morally wrong. It also assumes that genocide is one of the things that is morally wrong. Here is how the argument goes:

1. Genocide is a departure from the way that things ought to be.
2. If genocide is a departure from the way that things ought to be, then there is a way that things ought to be.
3. If there is a way that things ought to be, then there is a design plan for things.
4. If there is a design plan for things, then there is an author of the plan, a designer.
5. This designer we can call God.[4]

A full design plan would simply be a list of all those things that are morally right, that constitute the way that things ought to be, and the way that things ought not to be. Obviously, the genocide argument does not prove that God has all the properties that the

[4] I have adapted here, with his permission, an argument from Douglas Geivett.

God of theism is supposed to have. It does not prove that God is omnipotent or omniscient, for example. Still, since there can be no such thing as an authorless design plan, a plan for how things ought to be that follows merely from how things are, the designer must be a sentient being. That sentient being is not any one of us human beings, so it is surely God.

IV

My conclusion then is quite simple: if you want to avoid the contradictions and counter-intuitive implications of ethical relativism, your best bet is to embrace theism.

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Atheists Have No Problem of Evil, but They Have a Bigger One

Jerry L. Walls

"The problem of evil" is a loaded phrase. For one thing, it is packed with emotional freight owing to the fact that the phrase calls to mind some of the most hotly contested battles in both historical and contemporary philosophy. It has long been the favorite weapon in the atheists' arsenal, and has often been deployed proof that God does not exist. The argument from evil has often been advanced with deep sense of painful regret, but sometimes it has been wielded with a sense of sneering triumph.

The issue is massive in scope and importance, as well as enormously complicated, but it involves matters of such fundamental human significance that it does not require any special training to grasp the fundamental issues and why they matter so much. At stake are cosmic level questions about the very meaning of life and what sort of hopes we can rationally maintain.

Think about what is implied in the very phrase, "the problem of evil." Notice in the first place the obvious fact that the phrase assumes there *is* such a thing as evil. And second, that it is somehow a "problem." Now what is most telling is that these commonplace assumptions cannot simply be taken for granted today, and the reasons for this go back to the "enlightenment."

A PARADIGM SHIFT

The story of how the modern period lost the traditional problem of evil has been told by Susan Neiman in a fascinating book entitled *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*. There she describes how the problem of evil has undergone a number of transmutations and has come to be viewed in a radically different way as a result. In the introduction to that book, she states the fundamental conviction that drives the problem of evil: "Every time we make the judgment *this ought not to have happened*, we are stepping onto a path that leads straight to the problem of evil."[1]

However, the judgment also raises a question that can hardly be ignored, and it is this: what reason do we have to think of any given event or incident that it ought not to have happened? What grounds this judgment that we often make with such certainty and conviction? What distinguishes those things that ought to happen, or that simply happen as a matter of course, from those that ought not to happen?

These questions have a reasonably clear answer in Christian theology, where the reality of evil is apparent, as well as the sense in which it ought not to happen. Beginning with the Garden of Eden, if not in the primordial fall of Satan, evil has played a vital, if not central role in the drama of sin and redemption. Evil is very much a problem not only in the sense that it impairs the human flourishing that God intends for us and leads to various forms of suffering, but also in the sense that it has corrupted the entire fallen world and causes it to fall short of the purposes for which it was created. Evil is thus very much at odds with God and his purposes, and in this sense it ought not to happen.

But here is the bottom line: our passionate judgment, "this ought not to have happened" only makes sense given certain convictions about ultimate reality. What has traditionally driven the problem of evil is that ultimate reality is good because ultimate reality is a God who is not only perfectly loving and good, but also supremely powerful. But what becomes of the problem of evil when this conviction no longer holds?

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[1] Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 5.

The story Neiman tells is a story of a diminishing tendency or capacity or conviction to render the judgment *this ought not to have happened*. Her narrative is bookended by two events, each of which shook western thought and culture to its very foundations, namely, the Lisbon earthquake, and the Holocaust. These events, though radically different, are similar in the sense that both of them were devastating because they shattered fundamental beliefs and assumptions about our world and the nature of evil.

Prior to the Lisbon earthquake, such natural disasters were invested with great moral and theological significance. While many persons at the time still viewed Lisbon in those terms, there was a growing tendency in modern thought after that time to view such events as purely natural phenomena, void of moral significance or meaning. By late modernity, the shift was radical indeed. Neiman writes:

> For contemporary observers, earthquakes are only a matter of plate tectonics. They threaten, at most, your faith in government building codes or geologists' predictions. They may invoke anger at lazy inspectors, or pity for those stuck in the wrong place at the wrong time. But these are ordinary emotions.[2]

The difference between having your faith in God undermined and having your faith in government codes threatened is a paradigm shift of incalculable proportions. The difference between explaining earthquakes "only" in terms of tectonics and explaining them in terms of theology simply defies measure. And the difference between "ordinary emotions" of pity and regret and feelings of moral outrage of cosmic significance is similarly inestimable.

In any case, as a result of this dramatic shift in thinking, the problem of evil was largely dissolved, according to Neiman, and confined to a much smaller scale. She writes, "With natural evil reduced to regrettable accident, and metaphysical evil transformed to recognition of the limits we expect every adult to acknowledge, the problem of evil was as far on its way to dissolution as philosophical problems ever go."[3] But here is a huge question: is the dissolution of the problem on these terms in fact a good thing? Or is it in fact a

[2] Ibid., 246.
[3] Ibid., 268.

profound loss? Is it better to hold fast to the problem of evil, even if it is excruciating to do so, than to eliminate it on these terms?

Let us pursue this question further looking at the central claims of three pivotal figures, all of whom profoundly altered the shape of the problem of evil, and recast the terms in which it was understood. Each of these figures played a major role in dissolving the problem of evil as Neiman characterized it.

HUME, NIETZSCHE, AND FREUD

It is a great irony that one of the books most recognized as undermining belief in God is one in which the existence of a God is warmly and persistently affirmed. Although Hume's philosophy is notoriously naturalistic, none of the characters in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* espouses atheism. Even the skeptical Philo repudiates atheism as an absurd position that is obviously false. Near the end of the book, he says that if previous generations of atheists could hardly maintain their view in the face of overwhelming evidence for God's existence in the natural order, "to what pitch of pertinacious obstinacy must a philosopher in this age have attained who can now doubt of a Supreme Intelligence!"[4]

Of course, Philo criticizes the arguments for natural theology, particularly the teleological argument. But the playful urbanity of his speeches that aim to undermine the analogy between human designers and the Supreme Intelligence belies the passion of his moral critique that ultimately motivates his attack. It is only when Philo hammers away at the problem of evil with such eloquent force that his real agenda is revealed. At this point, he can cheerfully concede God's power and wisdom, fully aware that these are not nearly enough to sustain meaningful belief in God if his goodness has been undermined.

> His power, we allow, is infinite; whatever he wills is executed: But neither man nor any other animal is happy; therefore, he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite; He is never mistaken in choosing the means to any end; But

[4] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 78.

> the course of nature tends not to human or animal felicity: Therefore it is not established for that purpose. Through the whole compass of human knowledge there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these. In what respect, then, do his benevolence and mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of men?[5]

It is important to emphasize here that Philo's view of goodness is nothing esoteric or mysterious, and that he insists on an account of goodness that resembles the ordinary meaning of the term. For the creator to be good, he must will the happiness of his creatures. But in view of the widespread misery that characterizes human experience, it is apparent that our world was not designed to achieve this end.

Philo goes on to argue that it is most probable that the designer of our world is neither perfectly good, nor perfectly malicious, nor a combination of these, but rather that he has neither goodness nor malice. This, Philo insists, seems by far the most probable.

Philo presses home the implications of the hypothesis that God is morally indifferent in the final dialogue, and there we see what his belief in God really amounts to. With all moral attributes eliminated, God is reduced to an explanatory hypothesis to account for the order in the universe, a hypothesis that warrants "plain philosophical assent." This bare assent, however, "affords no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance."[6] Bluntly put, this God makes no difference whatever to our lives or how we live them. Indeed, Hume even goes so far as to suggest that, since God is so remote from us and his existence has no practical implications whatever, the dispute between theism and atheism is nothing more than a verbal one.

But here is the point I want to emphasize. Hume's argument for God's moral indifference is in one way an ingenious move to dissolve the problem of evil. For if the ultimate source of all things is not good in the ordinary sense of the word, if he (it?) has no moral properties, the enormous strain between God and evil is relieved. Here is why: if the ultimate cause of everything that exists is morally indifferent and has no concern for our happiness, we should not be

[5] Ibid., 63.
[6] Ibid., 88.

surprised if our world is not designed for our happiness, and is full of suffering. If God is not good, we have little reason to be confident in our judgments about what ought, or ought not, to happen.

Let us turn now to Nietzsche, whose response to the problem is radically different from Hume's. Here it is worth noting that Nietzsche is not a figure commonly associated with the theodicy debate. Nevertheless, Nietzsche had telling things to say about the problem, albeit very atypical things in keeping with the radical nature of his philosophy. In particular, he disdainfully dismissed the whole problem as an embarrassing symptom of the sickly weakness of modern man.

For Nietzsche, the problem is not that the world is hostile to human happiness. Rather, it is Christian morality that is hostile to happiness because it requires us to exercise moral restraints on the expression of our instincts in ways that Nietzsche found unnatural and stifling. "To *have* to combat one's instincts—that is the formula for *decadence*: as long as life is *ascending*, happiness and instinct are one."[7]

Nietzsche is zealous not only to celebrate this world in its entirety just as it is, but also ready to pour scorn on any invidious comparisons between this world and some other world purported to be more real, whether that world is an ideal Platonic realm or the Kingdom of God that Christians pray to come. To affirm this world just as it is represents Nietzsche's ideal of the Dionysian spirit as portrayed in classic Greek tragedy.

> Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types—*that* is what I call Dionysian, *that* is what I recognize as the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet. Not so as to get rid of pity and terror, not so as to purify oneself of a dangerous emotion through its vehement discharge—it was thus Aristotle understood it—: but, beyond pity and terror, *to realize in oneself* the eternal joy of becoming—that joy which also encompasses *joy in destruction*....[8]

To affirm "joy in destruction" as a component of "the eternal joy

[7] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Antichrist*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), 44

[8] Ibid., 121.

of becoming" has large implications not only for what would traditionally be categorized as natural evil, but also moral evil. Indeed, what Christian morality would see as paradigm cases of moral evil is recast by Nietzsche as raucous examples of the lads just having a good time.

> ...I expressly want to place on record that at the time when mankind felt no shame towards its cruelty, life on earth was more cheerful than it is today, with its pessimists. The heavens darkened over man in direct proportion to the increase in his feeling shame *at being man*.... I mean the sickly mollycoddling and sermonizing, by means of which the animal 'man' is finally taught to be ashamed of all his instincts.... Now, when suffering is always the first of the arguments marshalled *against* life, as its most questionable feature, it is salutary to remember the times when people made the opposite assessment, because they could not do without making people suffer and saw first-rate magic in it, a veritable seductive lure *to* life.[9]

It is important to emphasize that Nietzsche utterly rejects the idea of free will and moral agency. In his view, the lads on a rampage have no more freedom to do otherwise than a bird of prey has to refrain from eating and enjoying a tasty lamb. Strength naturally and inevitably expresses itself in domination and destruction.

> And just as the common people separates lightning from its flash and takes the latter to be a *deed*, something performed by a subject, which is called lightning, popular morality separates strength from the manifestation of strength, as though there were an indifferent substratum behind the strong person which had the *freedom* to manifest strength or not.[10]

As Nietzsche sees it, the will merely accompanies events, but does not explain anything. Free will is a massive and perniciously motivated error that was fabricated to justify blaming people and holding them accountable.

In short, the real problem with the problem of evil is that we

[9] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 43

[10] Ibid., 26.

consider it a problem. Nietzsche's dismissal of the problem is very much in keeping with his larger project to get "beyond good and evil" by rejecting Christian morality and restoring noble morality. If there is no God and no objective moral truth, we hardly have reason to think this world should be good in the Christian sense of supporting either our happiness or our moral virtue. And if there is no free will and moral agency, moral evil as traditionally construed is also eliminated.

It is hard to beat Nietzsche in terms of bracing rhetoric, but the view he takes of those who see evil as a problem was perhaps communicated more persuasively by a psychologist (although Nietzsche saw himself as a psychologist as well as a philosopher), namely, Sigmund Freud. Our culture, after all, is much more attuned to psychological categories than philosophical ones, and much inclined to interpret things psychologically than philosophically. Freud's influence here is due to his general thesis that religious belief is an illusion fostered by childish needs for security in a frightening world. The terrifying sense of helplessness that we feel as children is mitigated by the loving protection of a father, and our lasting sense of vulnerability leads us to cling to the idea of a more powerful father.

> Thus the benevolent rule of a divine Providence allays our fear of the dangers of life; the establishment of a moral world-order ensures the fulfillment of the demands of justice, which have so often remained unfulfilled in human civilization; and the prolongation of earthly existence in a future life provides the local and temporal framework in which these wish fulfillments shall take place.[11]

To expect the world to be a friendly place where justice will prevail and evil will be overcome and defeated is a childish fantasy not worthy of adult assent. To experience evil as a problem in the traditional sense is an embarrassment for adults, who come of age. Neiman concisely expresses Freud's view as follows: "If the problem is a form of metaphysical whining, we can only hope to grow out of it."[12]

Again, evil is not a problem in the sense that it is if one believes

[11] Sigmund Freud, *The Future of An Illusion*, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott, revised and newly edited by James Strachey (New York: Anchor Books, 1964), 47-48.
[12] *Evil in Modern Thought*, 320.

ultimate reality is good. Rather, evil is simply a part of the fabric of life to be expected and coped with by those who have a realistic assessment of things.

Before concluding this sketch I want to underscore the reality that powerful streams in modern thought undermined moral evil no less than natural evil. Indeed, the move to neutralize natural evil as bad stuff that just happens, with little if any moral significance, spread to human actions as human beings increasingly saw themselves as entirely continuous with the natural order. Particularly as human beings came to be viewed as entirely physical beings determined by natural laws like everything else, so called moral evil was viewed more and more as simply another unfortunate fact about the fabric of reality.

HOLDING FAST TO THE PROBLEM

The urgent question that remains, however, is whether neutralizing evil in this fashion and dissolving the problem of evil along these lines is a gain or a loss. Neiman speaks eloquently of the deeply divided condition of those who live in the wake of those streams of thought that attempt to naturalize evil, but cannot give up moral judgments.

> Lisbon ought not to have happened, but it did. Accepting this came to seem a minimal sign of maturity, and Voltaire's long lament about the earthquake appeared but an elegant version of the child's curse at the chair over which he stumbled. Neither earthquakes nor chairs are properly viewed as objects of outrage because neither contains any moral properties at all.... For those who refuse to give up moral judgments, the demand that they stop seeking the unity of nature and morality means accepting a conflict in the heart of being that nothing will ever resolve.[13]

Neiman leaves us with disquieting choices indeed. We can give up the sort of moral judgments that generate the traditional problem of evil, and quit insisting that the world *ought* to be a different sort of place than it *is*. We can be mature adults who are no longer under

[13] Ibid., 267-268.

the illusion that ultimate reality is good in some sense that is at odds with "evil" and come to grips with the fact that the world is what it is, and quit "whining" about what it ought to be. However, if we "refuse to give up moral judgments" we must reconcile ourselves to a deep rupture that will *never* be healed. This means coming to terms with the severe truth that reality is not what it ought to be and never will be. Evil simply is intractable reality and we are destined to live with a bitter conflict in our hearts and minds that mirrors an even deeper divide in the very heart of being.

I would suggest that we are much better off to have a problem of evil than to eliminate the problem on these terms. Indeed, atheists who do not have a problem of evil have a much bigger problem. So ironically, the problem of evil, which has been the main weapon in the arsenal of atheism, may provide an interesting argument for God's existence. For it is precisely the existence of God that makes best sense of why evil is a problem, and why we are making a true moral judgment when we say of some terrible event, that it ought not to have happened.

In short, for those who believe in God, we have another alternative besides giving up moral judgments, and "accepting a conflict in the heart of reality that nothing will ever resolve." We have reason to believe that evil is real, that it ought not to be this way, and that ultimately, when God's purposes of redemption are complete, that the deep divide in the very heart of being will finally be healed. The best reason to believe that evil really is a problem is also the best reason to believe it is not a problem beyond resolution.

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The Gospel as a Good Catastrophe

J.R.R. Tolkien's Literary Apologetics

Holly Ordway

Here is a seeming paradox: J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* does not mention Christ, the church, the Bible, or even God anywhere in its pages; yet it is deeply and profoundly Christian. *The Lord of the Rings* is a fantasy, peopled with elves and dwarves, hobbits and wizards, an invented story; yet it is spiritually and morally true. It is a work of literature; it is also, in its way, a powerfully effective work of apologetics.

This paradox is in reality no paradox at all, but rather an example of imaginative apologetics at work. The imagination is far more than what we might call 'Fancy' or idle daydreaming; it is a mode of knowing, just as the faculty of reason is a mode of knowing. In fact, the imagination is necessary for the reason to function. C.S. Lewis writes that "reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition."[1] Only when something has *meaning*, which is generated by the imagination, can we begin to use our reason to judge whether the meaning is true or false.

It is important to emphasize that while imaginative apologetics is distinct from propositional, or reason-focused, apologetics, it is by no means opposed to it. Rather, the imaginative and the rational are complementary; each is necessary for the full and proper functioning of the other. Tolkien had a keen and penetrating intellect – he was, after all,

[1] C.S. Lewis, "Bluspels and Flalanspheres: A Semantic Nightmare," *In Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 265.

one of the world's top scholars in the highly demanding academic field of philology – and he did not set aside his use of reason when he made use of his imagination. As he writes in his seminal essay "On Fairy-stories":

> Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make.[2]

A story such as *The Lord of the Rings* does not offer a direct argument, appealing straight to the intellect, but rather an imaginative and experiential approach – but this indirect approach is entirely compatible with more direct approaches as well. Literary apologetics provides an imaginative engagement with truth in fictional form; the reader's (or viewer's) encounter with images, characters, stories, and ideas in an imaginative mode can indeed whet the appetite to learn more, and prepare the reader to recognize and assimilate truth in rational and propositional forms. Tolkien himself was very much aware both of the Christian message of his work, and the importance of presenting it indirectly: through symbols, imagery, and (as we will see) the very structure of the fantasy story itself.

THEOLOGY AND FANTASY: TOLKIEN'S "ON FAIRY-STORIES"

There is a great deal that could be said on this topic; here we will consider the concepts that Tolkien introduces in his seminal essay "On Fairy-stories," which is an extended analysis of the workings of fantasy literature. His ideas are applicable to literature and the arts more broadly speaking, and to the discipline of literary apologetics.

"On Fairy-stories" had its origins as a public lecture that Tolkien gave at the University of St Andrews in 1939. The lecture came at a pivotal point in Tolkien's development as a fantasist. He was well established as a scholar of Anglo-Saxon and Middle English; he had been working for many years on the various stories and poems of the Silmarillion, he had recently published *The Hobbit*, and he had begun work on *The Hobbit* sequel that would become *The Lord of the Rings*. An expanded version of the lecture was published in 1947 in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*,

[2] J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *Tolkien On Fairy-stories*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins, 2014), 65.

edited by C.S. Lewis; a version with further revisions appeared in 1964 in Tolkien's collection *Tree and Leaf*.[3] Thus, the ideas that Tolkien expressed at St Andrews were further developed over the course of twenty-five years, during which time Tolkien was putting his theories into practice by writing and publishing *The Lord of the Rings*. "On Fairy-stories" is, as Verlyn Flieger puts it, "the template on which [Tolkien] shaped his idea of sub-creation, and the manifesto in which he declared his particular concept of what fantasy is and how it ought to work."[4]

Tolkien begins by arguing that "The definition of a fairy-story – what it is, or what it should be – does not, then, depend on any definition or historical account of elf or fairy."[5] Nor does fantasy, rightly defined, include travelers' tales, beast fables, or stories that use a dream framework. In regard to the last exclusion, Tolkien makes an important point. He argues that precisely *because* it contains "marvels," a fantasy story "should be presented as 'true'... it cannot tolerate any frame or machinery suggesting that the whole story in which they occur is a figment or illusion."[6] It is an essential quality of fantasy that it creates an immersive experience for the reader. A story-teller, Tolkien says, is a "sub-creator", who "makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while are, as it were, inside."[7] However, any clumsiness or inconsistency on the part of the story-teller that makes the reader aware of the artificiality of the secondary world will disrupt the reading experience: "the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside."[8]

To illustrate the difference between 'secondary belief' and mere 'willing suspension of disbelief,' consider a group of friends gathered around a big-screen TV to watch the World Cup.[9] The true football enthusiast

[3] The final version of the essay was published posthumously in 1983, in the collection *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. For more on the history of the text, see "The History of 'On Fairy-stories' in *Tolkien On Fairy-stories.* Ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson. London: HarperCollins, 2014.

[4] Verlyn Flieger, "Introduction," *Tolkien On Fairy-stories*. Ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins, 2014), 9. Note that this is the definitive edition of the essay, containing all its variants and including a very useful commentary on the text.

[5] Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," 32.

[6] Ibid., 35.

[7] Ibid., 52.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Tolkien uses the analogy of a cricket match to make this point; I have taken the liberty of updating his example.

watches the game in a state of full secondary belief; he urges on the players, shouts at the referee, and is plunged into joy or gloom by the events he sees on the screen. The same degree of involvement is not felt by his neighbor, who simply wishes to be sociable. He must take an interest in the game or else it will be a rather dull evening, even if there are good snacks, and so he cheers for his chosen team willingly enough. However, in so doing he has merely 'suspended his disbelief': which, as Tolkien puts it, "is a substitute for the genuine thing."[10] Insofar as he enjoys himself, he enjoys the camaraderie for which the game is the excuse rather than the game itself, and he is unlikely to watch other games on his own initiative. So, too, with fantasy novels. The full, immersive experience of readers in a work of fantasy literature is much more than 'suspension of disbelief.' A reader who is self-consciously aware of the artificiality of the secondary world may play along with the author, as it were, but such an effort would indicate that 'secondary belief' never came fully into effect at all.

To be sure, the reader's intention, interests, and prior experiences have an effect on the formation of secondary belief; some readers are much more readily drawn into the secondary worlds of fiction, just as some authors are particularly skilled at exciting secondary belief in even reluctant visitors to their literary world. The production of secondary belief is, of course, not limited to fantasy; it is a feature of other genres as well, including the realistic novel. While we are reading Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, we feel that Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy are real people in a real world.

What, then, makes fantasy different from other genres? For one thing, fantasy can operate more freely than realistic fiction, since the author is not limited to writing about things that exist or could exist in the Primary World. This creative freedom is a two-edged sword: it helps the fantasist to achieve what Tolkien views as the necessary quality of "strangeness and wonder",[11] but it also makes it more challenging to achieve the equally necessary "inner consistency of reality"[12] for the imagined world. Tolkien goes on to say:

> Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say the green sun. Many can then imagine or picture it. But that is not enough... To make a Secondary World inside which *the green*

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 59.

> *sun* will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft.[13]

The result of this special skill and labor is the literary art called fantasy, "story-making in its primary and most potent mode."[14]

The features of 'sub-creation' and 'secondary belief' are significant for apologetics because they point toward fantasy's relationship with reality. Fantasy, as Tolkien defines it, is not a flight from the Primary World, but a creative engagement with it. By its what-ifs and imaginings of things that are not, never were, and perhaps never could be, fantasy illuminates what is, was, and could be. Here we can see the connection between Tolkien's theology and his understanding of the creative process. Tolkien's high view of fantasy is grounded in his understanding of the sub-creative act as a reflection of the divine creative act: "we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker."[15] Fallen though they are, human beings make creative fantasy because they bear the image of a creative God and thus, for Tolkien, fantasy is fundamentally serious even at its most playful and extravagant.

RECOVERY

One of the functions of fantasy, Tolkien says, is Recovery:

> Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view. I do not say "seeing things as they are" and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say "seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them"—as things apart from ourselves.[16]

Tolkien identifies two related elements that contribute to our failure to see clearly: familiarity and possessiveness. Using the metaphor of a dirty, smudged window—whose film of grime obscures what we see through it—he says that we need "to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness."[17]

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[13] Ibid., 61.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 66. See also Tolkien's poem "Mythopoeia," from which he quotes a passage in "On Fairy-stories." In the poem he elaborates on the theological significance of creative fantasy. It appears in *Tree and Leaf* (London: HarperCollins, 1964), 83-90.
[16] Ibid., 67.
[17] Ibid.

This analysis is of the utmost importance for apologetics. When we think that we truly know something, we often stop really seeing it. We use words like love, forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation without recognizing, or communicating, their messy, painful, transformative reality. In day-to-day relationships, we may no longer really see our family, friends, and neighbors as themselves, but instead may see them instrumentally, in terms of what they can do for us – or how they get in our way. Indeed, Tolkien notes that our *familiares* are the "most difficult really to see with fresh attention, perceiving their likeness and unlikeness: that they are faces, and yet unique faces."[18]

Furthermore, we live in a culture that is paradoxically both jaded by, and ignorant about Christianity. People think they know who Jesus is, what the church is, what it means to have faith, and they are not interested. We need to help people recover a fresh view of the truth – to see Jesus for the first time, and really see him; to see the reality of sin, and the beauty and brokenness of the world, not to just gloss over it. Jesus said that unless we become like little children, we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Part of being child-like is to see things afresh: to look at God's creation and see it as his handiwork, to be able to read the words of Holy Scripture and be deeply moved at what we find.

Good stories and poetry can help us to see more clearly when we close the book and re-enter ordinary life. Thus, for the work of apologetics, we need stories that allow people to recognize in their own lives the potential to be made whole: for marriages, families, and friendships to be healthy and shaped as God made them to be; for our 'daily bread' to be tasted and savored once again; for the possibility of divine love and forgiveness.

Tolkien's concept of recovery also applies to the very words we use in apologetics dialogue. The words that we use to talk about the faith often do not mean what we *think* they mean, to our hearers. A young atheist who has been reading Dawkins and Dennet and Hitchens, and who has perhaps been exposed to the more shallow and sentimentalized expressions of Christian faith, *does not understand* what we mean by words like God, faith, prayer, resurrection, and so on.

Someone who is convinced that "God" means "old man in the sky" would be quite right to consider it ridiculous; to that person, arguments for the existence of an old man in the sky are self-evidently false, worthy only of mockery. What this atheist needs is to realize that Christians

[18] Ibid.

do not simply believe in one sky-father figure out of many options (as opposed to, say, Zeus) but rather that the word "God" that Christians use means "the ground of all being": God is existence itself, or as He says to Moses, "I AM." More arguments and dictionary definitions will not help in this situation; if our young atheist is already convinced that he knows what God means, he's not going to pay much attention to more arguments. What he needs is to see the idea afresh.

Michael Ward sums up the problem very nicely in his essay "The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best: CS Lewis on Imagination and Reason in Apologetics," he writes:

> It is no good arguing for 'God' or 'Christ' or for 'the atonement' or even for 'truth' until the apologist has shown, at least at some basic level, that these terms have real meaning. Otherwise they will just be counters in an intellectual game, leaving most readers cold. Likewise, apologetic arguments for the authority of the 'Church' or 'the Bible' or 'experience' or 'reason' itself, must all be imaginatively realized before they can begin to make traction on the reader's reason, let alone on the reader's will.[19]

Stories can help readers to 'imaginatively realize' the meaning of the words we use, and thus go beyond treating them as 'counters in an intellectual game.' After reading in *The Lord of the Rings* about the Ents, Tree-beard and the other shepherds of the trees, one might look at an ordinary tree, a pine or oak, and think: how extraordinary, really, is a tree! A reader who is moved by the self-sacrifice of Frodo and the kingliness of Aragorn is equipped to respond more immediately, more intuitively, to ideas of sacrifice and redemption, and to the image of Christ the King when they hear them in Scripture. Tolkien shows us how a story can help to *recover* meaning for words and ideas that are vitally important for apologetics.

ESCAPE

The second function of fantasy, Tolkien argues, is Escape. Thus, we must now address the charge that the 'escape' offered by fantasy is an immature, even anti-social experience. Stories about kingdoms that never existed being threatened by imaginary monsters and rescued through magic would seem to encourage a kind of emotional or social truancy from

[19] Michael Ward, "The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best," in *Imaginative Apologetics*, ed. Andrew Davison (Baker Books, 2012), 72.

the serious issues of 'real life.' It might be fine for children to read about knights and wizards, but an adult should grow out of it and graduate into reading novels that address life as it really is.

However, this objection does not hold water. To begin with, stories set in the 'real world' may offer to the reader a view of the world that is as unrealistic in its own way as any fantasy with elves and magic: a world in which violence solves problems, narcotic-fueled parties are endlessly exciting, wealth and power are readily available, intrigues happen without messy consequences of shattered families and betrayed friends, and women magically make bad men good by the power of their love (or through sex).

'Escapism' in its negative sense is far more likely to be produced by what C.S. Lewis calls "superficially realistic" literature, which presents "things that really might happen, that ought to happen, that would have happened if the reader had had a fair chance".[20] Such escapism is far more likely than fantasy to provoke envy, fruitless discontent, and a refusal to deal with the life and relationships a person really has; it can give a gloss of excitement or normality to behavior that in real life is destructive: adultery, drug-taking, abusive relationships. Fantasy can be escapist in the negative sense, to be sure – but it would be a feature of *bad* fantasy, as it is a feature of bad literature of any genre or bad art in any form.

Taking pleasure in the 'escape' offered by a fantasy novel is not a mark of immaturity or shallowness – far from it. Depending on one's circumstances, Escape may be sensible or even heroic, just as it might be in 'real life'. As Tolkien puts it:

> Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it.[21]

Furthermore, to escape means to recognize both something negative to be escaped *from*, and something positive to be escaped *into* – and so the experience of fantasy is in a constant dialogue with reality both as it is and as it could or should be. The reader who escapes into a good fantasy does not return to 'real life' unchanged.

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[20] C.S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," In *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*. Ed. Walter Hooper (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1982), 38.
[21] Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," 69.

CONSOLATION

The third function of fantasy that Tolkien discusses is what he calls "consolation," and above all the "consolation of the happy ending." He coins the word *eucatastrophe* for this idea, meaning "the good catastrophe": the unexpected happy ending, which gives us a profound taste of joy. Tolkien argues that the response we have to a happy ending is in fact a pointer toward the truth of the gospel.

The relevance of Tolkien's *eucatastrophic* vision for apologetics begins with the fact that it includes, necessarily, the recognition of *catastrophe*. We live in a broken, fallen world, and we suffer the effects of sin. Any presentation of the gospel that tries to skip over that reality will end up being trite, shallow, and ultimately both unattractive and unconvincing. Jesus is our friend, but he is not "Buddy Jesus." We have hope, but our faith is not a get-out-of-suffering-free card.

The problem of evil is one of the most commonly cited objections to Christianity. How can it be that a loving God would allow for atrocities, natural disasters, violence and oppression? There are many good responses to this question, including ones rooted in the consequences of God's gift to us of free will, but too often in apologetics we jump to the intellectual arguments immediately, in a way that seems to discount or dismiss the reality of suffering.

Christian popular fiction has a different problem: too often, it presents the faith in a sentimentalized way, afraid to tackle difficult questions or present a nuanced picture of reality: the equivalent in fiction and film of Thomas Kincade paintings, and about as artistically compelling. In contrast, secular literature, and even more so film and television, tends to the bleak and dystopian, and is morally unmoored. The result is that we see two extremes: a dark relentless focus on the brokenness of the world, or a sentimental, simplistic treatment that denies the brokenness of the world. There's not much in between.

If we move too quickly to assertions of faith, either intellectual or emotional, then we can fall into the trap of either cold intellectual arrogance or unbelievable, sentimental piety. We must recognize the reality of darkness and suffering, and the difficulties that surround faith in our culture today, but we cannot stay in that dark place. The second half of the *eucatastrophic* vision is that it includes the reversal, the possibility

of the 'good catastrophe,' the turn in the story that leads to Joy, indeed joy beyond the walls of the world.

Here we can see part of Tolkien's gift. Like his friend Lewis, Tolkien could show a convincing and attractive vision of the Christian faith, precisely because his faith, and thus his literary vision, included the dark but knew that the light triumphs. Tolkien lost both his parents in childhood; he fought in the trenches of World War I, where most of his close friends were killed; throughout his life, he experienced the strains of ill health and financial worries. Because he knew sorrow, Tolkien could show a convincing Joy: his work rings true.

However, atheists may say, what is the point of a happy ending if it is just made up? Sure, it makes you feel good for a moment, but it does not change the truth. The whole Christian story is just wishful thinking. Right? Not so fast. Tolkien considers the question: *why* do we have this lifting of the heart at the happy ending? Could it be because at a fundamental level, it really is true, and we are catching a glimpse of it? That, in fact, is exactly what Tolkien argues. All of human history is a story, he says, and one with a happy ending:

> The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the "inner consistency of reality."... This story is supreme; and it is true.[22]

Literary apologetics has much to offer us in our apologetics work. It is not the same thing as simply making an argument in the form of a story; rather, at its best, it *shows* the truth, and helps us desire it. It is not a substitute for teaching about doctrine, but it helps us see what doctrine *means*, and why it matters, and how we might live it out.

Tolkien's great work, *The Lord of the Rings*, is a pre-eminent example of literary apologetics, as is C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia, in a different way.[23] Not everyone likes fantasy, however; these works will not resonate with everyone, and in any case, the more, different, varied stories, poems, films, and works of art that share the light of Christ in different ways, the better. So as apologists, we should learn how to use well the great works that we have, like *The Lord of the Rings* and the Chronicles of Narnia;

[22] Ibid., 78.

[23] See Michael Ward's *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (OUP 2008), for a thorough analysis of the way in which the Narnia Chronicles are 'all about Christ.

we should also encourage Christian writers and artists, to do more work, for new audiences, sharing the good news in fresh ways. Those who have creative gifts should use them; those who do not can, and indeed should, cultivate good taste and high standards, and encourage their brothers and sisters in Christ to do creative work.

Let me close with Tolkien's own words of encouragement to artists, at the end of "On Fairy-stories":

> But in God's kingdom the presence of the greatest does not depress the small. Redeemed Man is still man. Story, fantasy, still go on, and should go on. The Evangelium has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them, especially the "happy ending." The Christian has still to work, with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope, and die; but he may now perceive that all his bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed. So great is the bounty with which he has been treated that he may now, perhaps, fairly dare to guess that in Fantasy he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation. All tales may come true; and yet, at the last, redeemed, they may be as like and as unlike the forms that we give them as Man, finally redeemed, will be like and unlike the fallen that we know.[24]

[24] Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," 78-79.

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Atheism and Its Impossible Imagination

How Literary Imagination Insists on Theist Morality

Corey Latta

Let me begin boldly: no atheist fiction writer, living or dead, has successfully created a world in the image of his non-belief. The possibility for such a non-believing world vanishes the moment an atheist author exercises imagination to create conscientious characters in a fictive society. As soon as the atheist author creates a fictive world, he populates that world with living characters. These characters must have a semblance of will, intent, emotion, civility, and they must live by the laws, both natural and moral, of their world. It is in the secondary world, in the tropes of character and identity, in themes of truth or doubt, in those questions of moral meaning and belief, that imagination both resists and ultimately redresses atheistic creativity.

I do not mean that atheist novelists have not created closed worlds populated by characters neglectful of morality or refusing of faith. Many have done that. Look no further than works like Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*, or Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* fantasy trilogy for fictive worlds of wanton morality written from an atheistic worldview. These, some of the most critically acclaimed and popular texts of the twentieth century, are only a few examples of unbelieving attempts to submerge, disturb, or undo theistic assumptions about life and morality. What I am saying is that as products of the imagination, the self-enclosed communities of Hemingway's characters, Burgess's

maddening dystopia, even Pullman's anti-theistic celebration of deceit (Lyra "Silvertongue," the heroine of Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, prides herself on her ability to lie with "bare-faced conviction") fail to escape the inherently theistic laws of imagination. To put it another way, there are atheist authors, but no atheist stories.

Imagination means the power to create new and previously unknown images and experiences, along with abstract ways of knowing those images and experiences (i.e., it does no good to write a story about space explorers discovering another world if I do not imagine ways they can know, understand, believe in, and relate to that world). It is important to note that in literature, the imagination creates those images and experiences consistent with the author's ultimate reality. So, to use a fantastic example, an author can write a story about a talking giant tree who befriends a lonely child, having met neither the fantastic character nor the child, precisely because in the ultimate reality the author inhabits, language, trees, friendship, and children actually exist. While the story's images are entirely new–its characters having never existed before mental conception–the author draws from those familiar cognate realities, like trees and children, and old sensory experience, like language. From the fragmented source material of reality–its nature, its physical properties, its diverse inhabitants, along with their morality and sense of life meaning–an author freely forms a secondary world made in the precise image of his creative vision.

In this way, the imaginative world, no matter how fantastic or illustrious, is essentially a distilled reality, a deliberately crafted parcel of cosmos written so that readers must wrestle with life's meanings, and in wrestling, must come to understand those meanings more fully and more deeply. What is so vitally important to remember, though, is that the author, regardless of his worldview, has the liberty to make any sort of world, full of any sorts of characters, he wants from the mental material available to him. From the raw material of his reality, an author may make any world his heart desires. And in this way authors are subject to the great law of human creativity: we create what is new and unknown from what is old and known. *Ex nihilo* has no part in human imagination.

Why is it then, to return to my main point, that no author has ever

created a world free from theistic morality–that is, from a morality that transcends the human condition and does not contain inherent truths that point to a higher Being? An atheist author is free to write any number of secular humanist stories, free to undo the aged myth of Christian belief, free to create a society unfettered from the oppressive gods of a higher truth, and yet, not one has. Every story, even the most nihilistic, supplies a moral subtext inexplicable apart from some higher agent from whom that morality originates. When we recall that the imagination is making what is new from bits of what is old, that we create what is not from what is, we find that no author has ever written an atheistic novel because the inherent material of his imagination is spoiled to his purpose.

If I set out to write a godless story about love, or bravery, or hate, or cowardice, or even existential doubt, I find that my very ideas are hopelessly infused with a meaning greater than the ones I gave it. No matter how I might like to write a society whose morality gets along fine without any moral lawgiver, I instantly find that the very ideas of morality which I would like to make new carry with them nagging old notions. And it would not take long, if I started to investigate from where exactly these nagging old ideas derive, to discover that the same moral precepts have cropped up across civilizations and their literature since the dawn of documented time.

It is no use saying that these moral precepts simply come from years of evolving human social prescription, for most moral precepts, even those that defy social utility, have remained the same since their first appearance. The questionable virtue of jealous love in Euripedes's *Medea* shows up again in Shakespeare's *Othello*. The honor and shame of which Homer wrote in the *Odyssey* are the same ideas Hemingway disturbs in *The Sun Also Rises*. Friendship in *Gilgamesh* is not very different than friendship in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*.

It seems when we think about works of seminal literature written with no theist intent that some kind of inexplicable moral ascent keeps showing up. Even in the bleakest literary moral visions of the modern age–something like William Burroughs's non-linear, nearly impenetrable, and obscene *Naked Lunch*–imaginative attempts to unravel higher moral meaning only serve confirm its permanence. In a world like Burroughs', the imagination can only play on and

push against the raw material of accepted moral principles, so when he writes a line like, "The broken image of Man moves in minute by minute and cell by cell....Poverty, hatred, war, police-criminals, bureaucracy, insanity, all symptoms of The Human Virus,"[1] he imaginatively assumes there is some "image of Man" that can experience moral brokenness (see the unnumbered Chapter titled, *islam incorporated and the parties of interzone*). He makes an imaginative moral judgment. What is brokenness, or the evil of poverty, or hatred if not all confirmations of higher polarized moral principles–for example, an unbroken image of man characterized by plenty and love – and from where did these values originate other than Burroughs' im/moral imagination.

For all their disturbances of Judeo-Christian principles or basic theist belief, novels like *Naked Lunch* present an imaginary immoral world that ultimately–when we begin to question the very meaning of the work's moral pronouncements–assumes, and then concedes to, a higher moral law. The origins of this moral law are inexplicable and only imposed on Burroughs' created world because they were first nested in Burroughs' own imagination. It is astonishing that even in works like *Naked Lunch*, readers do not find pages of nihilist answers to nihilist questions. If that were the case, the readers' moral imaginations would experience instant disconnect and that book would fade into an unpopular oblivion. Instead, Burroughs fills his world with Ecclesiastian doubts about moral meaning while interrogating those doubts with fragmented scraps of possible truth. And in each fragment exists an inherent meaning of which Burroughs is only a transcriber. The imagination only creates what is not from what is, and even in a Burroughs novel, what is has loaded moral meaning. In this way, atheism in *Naked Lunch* is unable to totally break the tethers of higher moral precept.

C. S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, calls these inescapable moral precepts the "moral law" and makes these key observations about the law's perennial presence:

> The Moral Law, or Law of Human Nature, is not simply a fact about human behaviour in the same way as the Law of

[1] William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 141.

> Gravitation is, or may be, simply a fact about how heavy objects behave. On the other hand, it is not a mere fancy, for we cannot get rid of the idea, and most of the things we say and think about men would be reduced to nonsense if we did. And it is not simply a statement about how we should like men to behave for our own convenience; for the behaviour we call bad or unfair is not exactly the same as the behaviour we find inconvenient, and may even be the opposite. Consequently, this Rule of Right and Wrong, or Law of Human Nature, or whatever you call it, must somehow or other be a real thing—a thing that is really there, not made up by ourselves.[2]

In making what is new the imagination works with what is already there, and what is already there are the irremovable realities about how morality should look in characters' lives. This moral law goes "above and beyond the ordinary facts of men's behaviour, and yet quite definitely real—a real law, which none of as made, but which we find pressing on us."[3] It is because of this law's presence that authors like Burroughs imagine innately morally charged themes of the human condition and poverty and hatred. Just as the atheist author works from the imagination so the atheist imagination works from a higher moral reality.

The raw materials of the imagination, and this point can hardly be overstated, with which an atheist writer creates are utterly saturated in higher moral meaning. The imaginative act, then, entails envisioning new worlds for old truths, gleaning from those moral meanings already available to the author, about whom George MacDonald–fantasy writer, theologian, great imaginative theorist, and C. S. Lewis's self-proclaimed "master"– says, "for the world around him is an outward figuration of the condition of his mind; an inexhaustible storehouse of forms whence he may choose exponents...the meanings are in those forms already, else they could be no garment of unveiling."[4]

The atheist author writes in no other imaginative power than that from the inexhaustible storehouse of forms offered by the

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[2] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1952), 20.
[3] Ibid.
[4] George MacDonald, "The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture," in *A Dish of Orts* (London: Sampson Low Marston & Company, 1893), 5.

world. Like the precepts of the moral law, each and every outward configuration of external reality already contains meaning, waiting for the imaginative act to reveal their deeper truths. In creating those inherently meaningful forms through stories, the writer exercises "that faculty in man which is likest to the prime operation of the power of God."[5] Unbeknownst to them, atheist writers imitate this prime operation of divine power by creating worlds that unintentionally affirm a transcendent moral law. And so atheism is pitted against man's imagination, man's chief creative power, which MacDonald describes as being "made in the image of the imagination of God."[6]

To show how inescapable imagination's adherence to theistic morality is, I want to look at one short text that embodies atheism's inability to be carried over into an author's created world: Ernest Hemingway's story, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." I choose Hemingway's short story for two simple reasons: First, it is a superbly written short story, rich and layered with complex meaning, beautiful in style. Second, Hemingway wrote "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" without any Christian or theist intent. It is truly a case study in the atheist imagination.

Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is the story of two waiters, one old and one young, both waiting to close up a café one late night. The remaining only patron is an old deaf man who tried to kill himself the week before. The two waiters see the old man's lingering late into the night differently, the younger waiter impatient for the deaf man to leave and the older much more understanding of the old man's need for a "clean, well-lighted place."

The old waiter says, "Each night I am reluctant to close up because there may be some one who needs the café." He feels the need for to create a space for "all those who do not want to go to bed" and to wait along with "all those who need a light for the night." The younger waiter does not understand why the deaf man cannot just go to a bar, chirping to the older waiter, "Hombre, there are bodegas open all night long." To which the older waiter replies, "You do not understand. This is a clean and pleasant cafe. It is well lighted. The

[5] Ibid., 3.
[6] Ibid., 4.

light is very good and also, now, there are shadows of the leaves."[7] We see in Hemingway's works a subtextual morality–and what I would call a subtle metaphysic–at work.

What good is a clean, well-lighted place, anyway? It has no inherent value. It's neither moral nor immoral. Hemingway has merely imagined a café incandescently illuminated and contrasted it against the outer dark of night and the dimmed atmosphere of a bar. And yet, Hemingway has, in drawing from the cafés and bars and storehouses of imagery from his own life, written a sort of apologetic for morality. According to the older waiter, Hemingway's moral voice, the deaf, unsuccessful suicide puts himself in the way of hope inside the café. Hemingway imagines the café as a solace with latent moral cleanness and order. The hopeless and desperate need "a certain cleanness and order" in their lives, according to the old waiter.

But Hemingway's realist imagination raises questions about ultimate moral meaning. For example, what sort of statement does the narrator really make about the old waiter, when he says, "He disliked bars and bodegas. A clean, well-lighted cafe was a very different thing?"[8] It seems as if Hemingway, despite his salient personal unbelief, makes a statement about morality and life meaning that mysteriously transcends what seems to be a closed world of artificial light, failed suicides, and mundane waiters.

To get at just the kind of statement Hemingway's short story makes, I think a look at C. S. Lewis's essay on Christianity and culture might prove helpful. On the value of culture in relaying higher theological truth, Lewis writes, "culture is a storehouse of the best (sub-Christian) values. These values are in themselves of the soul, not the spirit. But God created the soul. Its values may be expected, therefore to contain some reflection or antepast of the spiritual values."[9] When we look into the mirror of literature, quite the large mirror in the room of culture, and see its reflections, its flickered flashes of character and plot and dénouement, we see images

[7] Ernest Hemingway, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 382.
[8] Ibid., 383.
[9] C. S. Lewis, "Christianity and Culture," in *The Seeing Eye: And Other Selected Essays from Christian Reflections* (ed. Walter Hooper; New York: Ballentine Books, 1967), 30.

of moral intuition. And the small dark mirror of a Hemingway story is no exception.

Hemingway's café, its cleanness, and its well-lighted atmosphere reflect something greater and more essential to the human condition. Morality and hope and a bright existence in the community of others are imbedded in Hemingway's imagery of the deaf man in the clean, well-lighted café. These fixtures of the atheist imagination, despite the atheist author's creative intentions, ultimately "resemble the regenerate life," but only, Lewis points out, "as affection resembles charity, or honour resembles virtue, or the moon the sun. But though 'like is not the same', it is better than unlike. Imitation may pass into initiation"[10] Lewis here captures what Hemingway's café means as a function of the imagination. It is that imitation of the storehouse of reality imagined as a place of moral initiation. Hemingway writes a café story with threads of humanist morality–themes of goodwill toward another, care for life, the need to recover a hurting life–that come to nonsense apart from transcendent truth working to weave those threads into universal moral meaning.

To apply Lewis's terms to Hemingway's fiction, the deaf man might move from the imitation of clean moral order to an initiation into actual moral transformation. He might go from the reflection of moral truth in an artificially well-lighted café to the substance of truth in the real light of a redeemed life. What Hemingway imagined as a story of minimalist morality, becomes, upon consideration of the story's embodiment of that morality and its higher meaning, a story of moral ascension into metaphysical truth.

Once the old waiter finally leaves the café, he stops at a bar. The old waiter stands at the bar smiling, while thinking through a mock version of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee."[11] It is as if Hemingway's imagination cannot completely shed spiritual language, as he turns to the Lord's Prayer as a way to stir nihilistic doubt in his character. This barroom prayer is an instance of doubt seeking the assurance of faith. The old waiter's

[10] Ibid., 31.
[11] Hemingway, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," 383.

dismissive prayer fails to dismiss, as the old waiter has already given himself to the prayer's requests. Hemingway's imaginative vision for this scrambled prayer includes splintered versions of the lines, "give us this day our daily bread" and "deliver us from evil," lines that get at the essence of the old waiter's service to the deaf man. It is fitting that the old waiter would recall these particular lines from Jesus's prayer in the gospel of Matthew, as he literally served the deaf man his daily bread as well as delivered him from the dark world outside of the café.

The waiter, like Hemingway, uses his imagination to mock a God for which he has little use. And through that same imagination, creates a moral imperative that transcends the story's closed world, subtly pointing toward some higher Being. Interestingly, the waiter's actions move in a different current than his mock prayer, as he refuses another drink from the barman and goes home to lie awake till the sun comes up. A kind of small eschatology emerges as the story that begins in artificial light ends in the light of day. The old waiter's atheism, as evidenced in the false prayers, turns out to be a failure in the imaginative act. Why, given the freedom that atheism theoretically provides, would the old man bind himself to a kind of loving his neighbor? For the same reason that Hemingway, an author free to create any moral vision he desires, imagines a world of moral obligation and angst over Christian spirituality. The literary imagination does not allow for any other world.

I began by saying that no atheist writer has ever created a fictive world in his own image, and I have given only a few brief considerations as to why I think the imagination redresses atheism's influence. I will finish where I started by saying that the role of imagination in atheism is subversive. It cannot allow an author to construct an inhabitable world apart from those transcendent, timeless moral laws that govern necessarily imaginable habitation. If, as MacDonald said, the imagination is that power most alike "the prime operation of power of God,"[12] then we would do well to study it in the work of atheist authors in hopes that we might better know the creative resemblances of the regenerate life in literature as well as learn how the imagination's imitation of theist morality passes into Christian initiation.

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[12] MacDonald, "The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture," 3.

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The Resurrection of Theism

William Lane Craig

"The contemporary Western intellectual world," declares the noted philosopher Alvin Plantinga, "is a battleground or arena in which rages a battle for men's souls."[1] It is in the field of philosophy that the decisive battles are taking place, and the outcome of these contests will reverberate throughout the university and ultimately Western culture. In recent decades the battlelines have dramatically shifted, so that it is no exaggeration to speak of the resurrection of theism in Anglo-American philosophy over the last generation.[2]

In order to understand where we are today, we need first of all to understand something of where we have been. In a recent retrospective, the eminent Princeton University philosopher Paul Benacerraf describes what it was like doing philosophy at Princeton during the 1950s and '60s. The overwhelmingly dominant mode of thinking was scientific naturalism. Physical science was taken to be the final, and really only, arbiter of truth. Metaphysics—that traditional branch of philosophy which deals with questions about reality which are beyond science (hence, the name "*meta*-physics", *i.e.*, "beyond physics")—had been vanquished, expelled from philosophy like an unclean leper. "The philosophy of science," says Benacerraf, "was the queen of all the branches" of philosophy, since 'it had the tools. . . to address all of the problems.'"[3] Any problem that could not

[1] Alvin Plantinga, "The Twin Pillars of Christian Scholarship," Grand Rapids, Mich.: Calvin College and Seminary, 1990.

[2] *The Resurrection of Theism* was the title of Stuart Hackett's 1957 book, which was truly ahead of its time. Had this book been published by Cornell University Press instead of Moody Press, the revolution in Christian philosophy would have begun ten years earlier than it did.

[3] Paul Benacerraf, "What Mathematical Truth Could Not Be—I, " in *The Philosophy of Mathematics Today*, ed. Matthias Schirm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 42.

be addressed by science was simply dismissed as a pseudo-problem. If a question did not have a scientific answer, then it was not a real question—just a pseudo-question masquerading as a real question. Indeed, part of the task of philosophy was to clean up the discipline from the mess that earlier generations had made of it by endlessly struggling with such pseudo-questions. There was thus a certain self-conscious, crusading zeal with which philosophers carried out their task. The reformers, says, Benacerraf:

> trumpeted the militant affirmation of the new faith..., in which the fumbling confusions of our forerunners were to be replaced by the emerging science of philosophy. This new enlightenment would replace the old metaphysical views with a new mode of doing philosophy...[4]

The book *Language, Truth, and Logic* by the British philosopher A. J. Ayer served as a sort of manifesto for this movement. As Benacerraf says, it was "not a great book," but it was an "excellent exponent of the spirit of the time."[5] The principal weapon employed by Ayer in his campaign against metaphysics was the vaunted Verification Principle of Meaning. According to that Principle, which went through a number of revisions, a sentence in order to be meaningful must be capable in principle of being empirically verified. Since metaphysical statements were beyond the reach of empirical science, they could not be verified and were therefore dismissed as meaningless combinations of words.

Ayer was very explicit about the theological implications of this Verificationism.[6] Since God is a metaphysical object, Ayer says, the possibility of religious knowledge is "ruled out by our treatment of metaphysics." Thus, there can be no knowledge of God.

Now someone might say that we can offer evidence of God's existence. But Ayer will have none of it. If by the word "God" you mean a transcendent being, says Ayer, then the word "God" is a metaphysical term, and so "it cannot be even probable that a god exists." He explains, "To say that 'God exists' is to make a metaphysical

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), Chapter VI: "Critique of Ethics and Theology."

utterance which cannot be either true or false. And by the same criterion, no sentence which purports to describe the nature of a transcendent god can possess any literal significance."[7]

Suppose some Christian says, "But I know God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You can't deny my personal experience!" Ayer is not impressed. He would not think to deny that you have an experience, he says, any more than he would deny that someone has an experience of, say, seeing a yellow object. But, he says, "whereas the sentence 'There exists here a yellow-coloured material thing' expresses a genuine proposition which could be empirically verified, the sentence 'There exists a transcendent god' has . . . no literal significance" because it's not verifiable. Thus the appeal to religious experience, says Ayer, is "altogether fallacious."[8]

I hope you grasp the significance of this view. On this perspective statements about God do not even have the dignity of being false. They are devoid of any factual content and so can be neither true nor false. Ask yourself how sympathetic to theistic faculty and students a university community dominated by such a philosophical outlook would be.

And it wasn't just metaphysical statements that were regarded as meaningless. Ethical statements—statements about right and wrong, good and evil—were also declared to be meaningless. Why? Because they can't be empirically verified! Such statements are simply emotional expressions of the user's feelings. Ayer says, "If now I... say, 'Stealing money is wrong,' I produce a sentence which has no factual meaning. . . . It is as if I had written, 'Stealing money!!' . . . It is clear that there is nothing said here which can be true or false."[9] So he concludes that value judgments "have no objective validity whatsoever."[10] The same goes for aesthetic statements concerning beauty and ugliness. According to Ayer, "Such aesthetic words as 'beautiful' and 'hideous' are employed..., not to make statements of fact, but simply to express certain feelings..."[11]

It's sobering to realize that this was the sort of thinking that

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[7] A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), 115.
[8] Ibid., 119.
[9] Ibid., 107.
[10] Ibid., 108.
[11] Ibid., 113.

dominated the departments of philosophy at British and American universities during the last century into the 1960s. It was not without its impact on religious life. Under the pressure of Verificationism, some theologians began to advocate emotivist theories of theological language. On their view theological statements are not statements of fact at all but merely express the user's emotions and attitudes. For example, the sentence "God created the world" does not purport to make any factual statement at all but merely is a way of expressing, say, one's awe and wonder at the grandeur of the universe. The low point undoubtedly came with the so-called Death of God theology of the mid-1960s. On April 8, 1966, the cover of *Time* magazine was completely black except for three words emblazoned in bright, red letters against the dark background: "Is God Dead?" And the article described the movement then current among American theologians to proclaim the death of God.

Today that movement has all but disappeared. What happened?

What happened is a remarkable story.

Philosophers exposed an incoherence which lay at the very heart of the prevailing philosophy of scientific naturalism. They began to realize that the Verification Principle would not only force us to dismiss theological statements as meaningless, but also a great many scientific statements, so that the Principle undermined the sacred cow of science at whose altar they knelt. Contemporary physics is filled with metaphysical statements that cannot be empirically verified. As the eminent philosopher of science Bas van Fraassen nicely puts it: "Do the concepts of the Trinity [and] the soul...baffle you? They pale beside the unimaginable otherness of closed space-times, event-horizons, EPR correlations, and bootstrap models."[12] If the ship of scientific naturalism was not to be scuttled, Verificationism had to be cut loose.

But even more fundamentally, it was also realized that the Verification Principle is self-refuting. Simply ask yourself, is the sentence "A meaningful sentence must be capable in principle of being empirically verified" *itself* capable of being empirically verified? Obviously not; no amount of empirical evidence would serve to

[12] Bas van Fraassen in *Images of Science*, ed. by P. Churchland and C. Hooker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 258.

verify its truth. The Verification Principle is therefore by its own lights a meaningless combination of words, which need hardly detain us, or at best an arbitrary definition, which we are at liberty to reject. Therefore, the Verification Principle and the theory of meaning it supported has been almost universally abandoned by philosophers.

Undoubtedly, the most important philosophical event of the twentieth century was the collapse of the Verificationism that lay at the heart of scientific naturalism. One result of this collapse has been the rise of Postmodernism. Scientific naturalism, originating in the Enlightenment, is characteristic of so-called "Modernity," or the modern age, which is dominated by science and technology. The collapse of Verificationism brought with it a sort of disillusionment with the whole Enlightenment project of scientific naturalism.

This might seem at first blush a welcome development for Christian believers, weary of attacks by Enlightenment naturalists. But in this case the cure is worse than the disease. For Postmodernists have tended to despair of ever finding objective truth and knowledge. After all, if science, man's greatest intellectual achievement, cannot do so, then what hope is there? Hence, Postmodernists have tended to deny that there are universal standards of logic, rationality, and truth. This claim is obviously incompatible with the Christian idea of God, who, as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, is an objectively existing reality, and who, as an omniscient being, has a privileged perspective on the world, grasping the world as it is in the unity of his intellect. There is thus a unity and objectivity to truth which is incompatible with Postmodernism. Postmodernism is therefore no more friendly to Christian truth claims than is Enlightenment naturalism. Christianity is reduced to but one voice in a cacophony of competing claims, none of which is objectively true.

Enlightenment naturalism is, however, so deeply imbedded in Western intellectual life that anti-rationalistic currents like Romanticism and Postmodernism are doomed, I think, to be mere passing fashions. After all, nobody adopts a Postmodernist view of literary texts when reading the labels on a medicine bottle or a box of rat poison! Clearly, we ignore the objective meaning of such texts only at peril to our lives. In the end, people turn out to be subjectivists only about ethics and religion, not about matters

provable by science. But that's not Postmodernism; that's just classic Enlightenment naturalism—it's the old Modernism in a fashionable new guise. Underneath the costume it's the same, old subjectivism and relativism that were characteristic of Modernity's view of religion and ethics.

Fortunately, Postmodernism is not the only result of the collapse of Verificationism. Since Verificationism had been the principal means of barring the door to metaphysics, the jettisoning of Verificationism meant that there was no longer anyone at the door to prevent this dreaded and unwelcome visitor from making a reappearance. So the demise of Verificationism has been accompanied by a resurgence of metaphysics in Anglo-American philosophy, along with all the other traditional questions of philosophy which had been suppressed by the verificationists. Along with this resurgence has come something new and altogether unanticipated: the birth of a new discipline, Philosophy of Religion, and a renaissance in Christian philosophy.

Since the late 1960s Christian philosophers have been coming out of the closet and defending the truth of the Christian worldview with philosophically sophisticated arguments in the finest scholarly journals and professional societies. At the same time that theologians were writing God's obituary, a new generation of philosophers was re-discovering His vitality. And the face of Anglo-American philosophy has been transformed as a result. Just a few years after its death of God issue, *Time* ran a similar cover story, only this time the question read, "Is God Coming Back to Life?" That's how it must have seemed to those theological morticians of the 1960s! During the 1970s interest in philosophy of religion continued to grow, and in 1980 *Time* found itself running another major story entitled "Modernizing the Case for God" in which it described the movement among contemporary philosophers to refurbish the traditional arguments for God's existence. *Time* marveled:

In a quiet revolution in thought and argument that hardly anybody could have foreseen only two decades ago, God is making a comeback. Most intriguingly, this is happening not among theologians or ordinary believers, but in the crisp intellectual

circles of academic philosophers, where the consensus had long banished the Almighty from fruitful discourse.[13]

According to the article, the noted American philosopher Roderick Chisholm believed the reason that atheism was so influential a generation ago is that the brightest philosophers were atheists; but now, he says, many of the brightest philosophers are theists, and they are using a tough-minded intellectualism in defense of that belief that was formerly lacking on their side of the debate.

Today philosophy of religion flourishes in young journals such as the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, Religious Studies, Sophia, Faith and Philosophy, Philosophia Christi, American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly,* and other journals devoted to the discipline, not to mention the standard non-specialist journals. Professional societies such as the Society of Christian Philosophers, the Evangelical Philosophical Society, the American Catholic Philosophical Society, not to mention other smaller groups, number thousands of members. Publishing in philosophy of religion is booming, as is evident from the abundance of available textbooks (also testimony to the seemingly insatiable interest among students for courses on the subject). If you peruse the current book catalogue of Oxford University Press, you will find no less than 50 new books in philosophy of religion. That compares with 28 in metaphysics, 39 in epistemology, 31 in applied ethics, and so on.

To give you some feel for the impact of this revolution in Anglo-American philosophy, I want to quote at some length from an article by Quentin Smith which appeared in the fall of 2001 in the secularist journal *Philo* lamenting what Smith called "the desecularization of academia that evolved in philosophy departments since the late 1960s." Smith, himself a prominent atheist philosopher, writes:

> By the second half of the twentieth century, universities... had been become in the main secularized. The standard... position in each field... assumed or involved arguments for a naturalist world-view; departments of theology or religion aimed to understand the meaning and origins of religious

[13] "Modernizing the Case for God," *Time* (7 April 1980), 65-66.

writings, not to develop arguments against naturalism. Analytic philosophers... treated theism as an anti-realist or non-cognitivist world-view, requiring the reality, not of a deity, but merely of emotive expressions or certain "forms of life"...

This is not to say that none of the scholars in the various academic fields were [*sic*] realist theists in their "private lives"; but realist theists, for the most part, excluded their theism from their publications and teaching, in large part because theism... was mainly considered to have such a low epistemic status that it did not meet the standards of an "academically respectable" position to hold. The secularization of mainstream academia began to quickly unravel upon the publication of Plantinga's influential book, *God and Other Minds*, in 1967. It became apparent to the philosophical profession that this book displayed that realist theists were not outmatched by naturalists in terms of the most valued standards of analytic philosophy: conceptual precision, rigor of argumentation, technical erudition, and an in-depth defense of an original world-view. This book, followed seven years later by Plantinga's even more impressive book, *The Nature of Necessity*, made it manifest that a realist theist was writing at the highest qualitative level of analytic philosophy, on the same playing field as Carnap, Russell, Moore, Grünbaum, and other naturalists...

Naturalists passively watched as realist versions of theism, most influenced by Plantinga's writings, began to sweep through the philosophical community, until today perhaps one-quarter or one-third of philosophy professors are theists, with most being orthodox Christians. Although many theists do not work in the area of the philosophy of religion, so many of them do work in this area that there are now over five philosophy journals devoted to theism or the philosophy of religion...

...theists in other fields tend to compartmentalize their theistic beliefs from their scholarly work; they rarely assume and never argue for theism in their scholarly work. If they did,

> they would be committing academic suicide or, more exactly, their articles would quickly be rejected... But in philosophy, it became, almost overnight, "academically respectable" to argue for theism, making philosophy a favored field of entry for the most intelligent and talented theists entering academia today.

Smith concludes,

> God is not "dead" in academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments.[14]

This is the testimony of a prominent atheist philosopher to the transformation that has taken place before his eyes in Anglo-American philosophy. Now I think he's exaggerating when he estimates that one-quarter to one-third of American philosophers are theists; but what his estimations do reveal is the *perceived impact* of Christian philosophers upon this field. As all revolutionaries know, a committed minority of activists can have an impact far out of proportion to their numbers. The principal error that Smith makes is calling philosophy departments God's "last stronghold" at the university. According to the Leiter report on philosophy the number of Christians among graduate students in philosophy is 50% higher than among current faculty, which suggests that the revolution will continue.

But, you may ask, what about the so-called "New Atheism" exemplified by Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens? Does not it herald a reversal of this trend? Not really. As is evident from the authors New Atheists interact with (or rather *do not* interact with!), the New Atheism is, in fact, a pop cultural phenomenon lacking in intellectual muscle and blissfully ignorant of the revolution that has taken place in Anglo-American philosophy. It tends to reflect the Positivism of a bygone generation rather than the contemporary intellectual scene. Atheism, though perhaps still the dominant viewpoint at the American university, is a philosophy in retreat.

As a result of the work of Christian philosophers genuine advance

[14] Quentin Smith, "The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism," *Philo* 4/2(2001): 3-4.

has been made on important issues like the epistemic status of belief in God, the coherence of theism, and the problem of evil, so that questions which dominated earlier discussions have been resolved or have yielded to new questions. For example, the so-called presumption of atheism, which so dominated mid-twentieth century philosophy of religion, according to which atheism is a sort of default position, is now a relic of the past. Similarly, scarcely any philosopher today defends the so-called logical version of the problem of evil, which claims that God and the suffering in the world are logically incompatible. The discussion of the coherence of theism, which analyzes the principal attributes traditionally ascribed to God, such as aseity, necessity, eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, has been an especially fertile field of exploration.

The renaissance of Christian philosophy has not been merely defensive, however. Rather it has also been accompanied by a resurgence of interest in natural theology, that branch of theology which seeks to prove God's existence apart from the resources of authoritative divine revelation. All of the traditional arguments for God's existence, such as the cosmological, teleological, moral, and ontological arguments, not to mention creative, new arguments, find intelligent and articulate defenders on the contemporary philosophical scene.

Of course, there are replies and counter-replies to all of these arguments, and no one imagines that a consensus will be reached. But theists welcome this debate. For the very presence of the debate is itself a sign of how healthy and vibrant a theistic worldview is today.

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Christianity, a Recipe for Healthy Social Cooperation

Jeremy Neill

It has long been commonplace for atheists to assert that theistic worldviews are foolish and a flight from our rational responsibilities. But these days, among new atheists like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris there has arisen a novel criticism that has been aimed more at the moral and political implications of theistic worldviews, rather than at their intellectual irresponsibility. Such worldviews, and the organized religious forms that they inspire, are now purported to be forces of wickedness that do damage to human social cooperation by virtue of their untoward moral and educational demands. The list of nefarious deeds that is cited by the new atheists includes the promotion of creationism as an origins myth in our schools, an advocacy of warlike foreign policies as ways of advancing God's kingdom, the imposition of intolerant sexual restrictions upon other citizens, and, occasionally the doing of religiously-inspired violent deeds. Typical is for new atheists like Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett, and Harris to assert that the theists who hold these views are ignorant and zealous, and that their theistically-informed social and moral ideals ought no longer to be tolerated. In this article I will be asserting, against the new atheists, that rather than being sources of political instability or non-cooperation, it is possible for theistic worldviews to offer their adherents a public participation platform that is just as hopeful, stable, and aspirational as the participation platform that is available to the new atheists. The stability, hope, and aspiration that arise out of the two beliefs that there is (1) a good for humans, and (2) that that good is being providentially guided or sustained – beliefs that are more robustly available to theists than

they are to non-theists – equip theists to be just as collaborative and idealistic as their non-theistic counterparts, and thus to be just as effective as liberal democratic cooperators. More particularly, my argument will be that it is important in liberal democracies that the citizens believe, at least collectively, in the ability of public forms of decision-making to produce a more optimal cooperative future. Such a mindset is more readily available when the citizens believe, as theists usually do, in a providential sustenance of the human good.

At the outset of my reflections, and to illustrate the prevalence of the new atheist view that theism is a wicked worldview, I will briefly highlight some of the rather startling assertions that have been made in recent years by Richard Dawkins. I do not here have the space to explore the ideas of his fellow new atheists Hitchens, Dennett, and Harris. But much of my argument against Dawkins is likely to apply to them as well.

Consider Dawkins's book *The God Delusion*. In the course of the book Dawkins selects choice passages from some of the world's major religious texts, and he argues that these passages have driven large numbers of religious persons down through the centuries to do oppressive deeds toward their neighbors. For Dawkins, the moral zeal that he thinks has been typical of religious believers down through history has in fact been a dangerous force because it has led them in high percentages to do deeds of malice, intolerance, and violence. Such deeds are barbaric and out of touch with the enlightenment and humanism of our modern age. By contrast, for Dawkins the tolerant psychology that he thinks is typical of secularists is a more morally upright approach to the world. Secularism does not inspire the doing of dastardly deeds. For Dawkins, whenever secularists find that they are confronting those incorrigible intellectual disagreements in which their religious counterparts, typically, are endeavoring to win via techniques of oppression, the secularists instead seek to tolerate their neighbors and to persuade their neighbors via education – thus avoiding the path of coercion of religious persons. So secularists are more enlightened than their religious counterparts and are for Dawkins the representatives of the humanistic zeitgeist of our times. Practically speaking, secularists have better skills for navigating their political surroundings than do their theistic counterparts.

When Dawkins says that religion is politically pernicious, what I understand that he means is that what has caused theists in history to do dastardly deeds is their belief in God – and not their various other beliefs. Consider Thomas de Torquemada, Ferdinand's and Isabella's chief inquisitor in 15th century Spain. For Dawkins, it presumably was not Torquemada's belief in a medieval theory of the soul that caused him to torture religious dissenters in such horrifying ways. Rather, it was Torquemada's belief that God exists and that God is wrathful toward heretics. Dawkins would certainly agree with his fellow atheist Christopher Hitchens's historical illustrations of this sort of claim. Among the crimes that Hitchens cites in his book *God Is Not Great* are the Christian crusades of the early medieval era, the Protestant-Catholic 'troubles' in twentieth-century Belfast, the Muslim-Christian civil war of the 1980s in Beirut and greater Lebanon, the 1990s ethnic and religious cleansings of the Christian Orthodox Serbs in the Balkans, the Shia-Sunni conflict in Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, the death sentence fatwa issued by the Ayatollah Khomeini against Salman Rushdie in February 1989 for his purported religious apostasy, and the numerous Muslim-Hindu street conflicts that have occurred in recent decades in Indian cities like Bombay (now Mumbai). I will focus here on Dawkins's *God Delusion*, however, and I will call Dawkins's argument the 'dastardly theists' argument. Its gist is the claim, advanced via a selective inspection of historical events, that theism promotes pernicious behaviors. Typical is to say that theism is non-cooperative and wicked, and that the dastardly deeds of theists like Torquemada are evidence of this. The argument supposes that the truth of a worldview is determinable via an inspection of its cooperative consequences. Theism must be false if so many of its adherents have done dastardly deeds.

Dawkins's belief that religion poisons everything and that it is politically pernicious is in spite of its popularity a troubling assertion, and it is one that I intend to dispute. One response to Dawkins is to say that the capacity in principle of a worldview to promote a cooperative mindset is not a guarantee that its adherents in fact in practice will be cooperative. To be sure, I grant Dawkins the claim that a belief in God's existence has been central to the justifications that many dastardly theists have offered for their deeds. I also acknowledge that there are many theists, historically, who have not

been any more cooperative than their atheist counterparts. Theism has had a history that is much longer than Dawkins's atheism. Today it is not difficult for atheists like Dawkins to cherry-pick their way through that history and to find numerous religiously-inspired examples of evil.

Yet my own view, in contrast to Dawkins, is that both theists and atheists alike are prone to the doing of dastardly deeds. Both sides can play this rhetorical game, because both sides can disparage the other via a selective inspection of the behaviors of the other's adherents. Consider some of the other events in history that Dawkins conveniently neglects. There are atheists too who have committed great evils. The Soviet Gulag, the National Socialist Concentration Camps, the Killing Fields of the Khmer Rouge, Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward, and the Chinese Cultural Revolution all were 20th century evils that arose out of atheistic assumptions. If, say, Dawkins's brand of liberal secularism were to become widespread and to flourish for thousands of years in the way that theism has done then I am confident that it too would produce many similarly dastardly characters and deeds.

The upshot is just that the dastardly deeds of some theists do not demonstrate that their worldviews are, in some inherent sense, wicked belief systems. Numerous theists in history have done evil out of theistic assumptions, and numerous atheists in history have done evil out of atheistic assumptions. Humans do bad things, period, regardless of whether they are theists or atheists. As such, I do not think that the game of rhetorical consequentialism at the end of the day helps the cause of the new atheists and I do not consider it to be interesting to debate any further with Dawkins about whether it is the theism of theists that has caused them sometimes in history to do dastardly deeds.

THE COOPERATIVE VIRTUES OF THEISM

More interesting in my view than a historical tit-for-tat is a more theoretical investigation. I mean in particular an inspection of the dispositional implications of theism and non-theism. To this end, I want briefly to consider the cooperative virtues that are facilitated by theism and non-theism. There are of course numerous different

theisms and as such in order to conduct an orderly conversation I will limit my topic to just one kind. My argument could be applied to both Islam and Judaism, but here I will focus only on the theism with which I am most familiar: Christianity, a worldview that Dawkins accuses of frequent dastardly deeds. I am interested only in mainstream versions of Christianity, by which I mean versions of Christianity that have had venerable histories and numerous adherents – the Catholic Church, Lutheranism, Russian Orthodoxy, Methodism, the Baptist tradition, and so forth. I grant that there have been numerous individual outliers in history who have claimed to be Christians but whose deeds have been evil and who have not gained substantial followings. Any worldview, including atheism, will have such outliers.

Do the beliefs of mainstream Christian traditions promote the virtues of political cooperation? I contend that they do. In fact, the cooperative tools that Christianity offers are superior to the tools that are usually otherwise available. In making this claim I will be advancing a principle-based argument – not a historical or practice-based one – and I will be analyzing particular Christian beliefs and then asking what the corresponding traits are that are promoted by these beliefs. I will not be analyzing all of the different traits that Christianity promotes. My point will simply be, against Dawkins, that some dispositional traits are cooperative and that they follow naturally from Christian beliefs.

A capacity for hope and a desire for stability are the particular traits that I have in mind, and that I think that are robustly promoted by Christianity. For starters, Christianity teaches a strong view of divine providence. God exists, God is sovereign, and God guides human affairs in providential ways. In fact, God's interest in human affairs is deeply benevolent: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28, NIV). God allows humans a sphere of decision-making autonomy, but he also at the same time orchestrates our circumstances in constructive ways. The question, of course, is what exactly is the practical meaning of this providential orchestration?

Consider the trait of hope. Does Christianity's robust divine

sovereignty commitment equip it in some special way to promote cooperative hope? I think that it does. In one sense, Christians are hopeful about the afterlife. By virtue of their belief in divine providence, Christians think that the wrongs of the human experience will be righted at the end of time. A great reversal will take place and the impoverished, the forgotten, the servants, the unselfish, and persons who have undergone suffering for the sake of the gospel will all be rewarded.

But in another sense, Christians can be hopeful for this life as well. Christianity teaches that God is providentially involved in human affairs. God guides and equips His people, whether for their personal sanctification, or for prudent decision-making, or in order to facilitate neighborly cooperation. God would not allow their social and political involvement to skid far off the rails, apart from His divine plan, in such a way that His people make catastrophic choices that he did not foresee. So Christians can be hopeful in this life that God offers them a providential backstop, a support system to channel their cooperation efforts toward constructive purposes.

A similar hope arises from Christianity's teaching that God offers a non-subjective ideal of justice. For Christians, social justice is not a mere human convention, and it is not changeable via human artifice. Humans did not create social justice via thought experiments like Rawls's original position. Instead, social justice is an ideal of desert, restitution, and distribution that is independent of human conventions and that is providentially sustained by God. It is independent of human design, it has eternal significance, and it will be fully realized at the end of time. So Christians view their quest for social justice here on earth as being part of God's larger plan. Christians can more thoroughly hope than they otherwise could that they can via social cooperation take steps here on earth toward God's eternal justice. Hope for human cooperation follows naturally from the belief that there is a good of justice for humans and that that good has divine backing. Such a belief facilitates optimism because it facilitates the idea that we can here and now take steps toward eternal justice.

Finally, I take it that it is good for persons to be hopeful in the ways that I am describing – whether in the future, in themselves,

in the promise of things working out, or in the possibility of better forms of cooperation with their neighbors. Such hopes can inspire them to engage in social revitalization efforts, to make second attempts at conquering moral evils, to strive for harmony with their neighbors, and to seek more optimal cooperative arrangements. When liberal democratic citizens believe that it is possible for a particular understanding of the good to be true – whatever it is – and likewise when they are facilitating each other's pursuit of such an understanding, they are equipped for more profitable conversations than would otherwise be possible. The upshot is just that Christianity offers its adherents robust reasons for cooperation, on the basis of its promise of social justice.

Similar hopes are perhaps less available to those non-theists who have given up on the prospect of finding a good for humans and also on improving our social cooperation efforts in the course of our quest to find such a good. Consider the cooperative outcomes for which it is possible for an atheist like Richard Dawkins to hope. Dawkins does not believe in any providential sustenance of humanity, or any eternal rectification of wrongs. He also does not believe in non-anthropocentric standards of morality. In fact his main hope, at most, is for a sense of enlightenment – for himself, for his philosophical interlocutors, and for his culture. He desires in particular that the bleak realities that he considers to be true about God (i.e. God's non-existence), the universe, and the insignificance of humans be spread at large in the culture in a way that is enlightening. His cooperative hope is for a greater sense of enlightenment that will reveal the stark truths of our circumstances.

But since Dawkins's hopes are not bolstered by any deep or thoroughgoing commitment to divine providence, what hope can he offer for believing in the achievement of better social justice arrangements? Such providence as Dawkins offers is derived, at best, from evolutionary theory. Dawkins takes pains to criticize the cooperative histories of Christianity and Islam, saying they are unenlightened and inhumane, and that they violate our contemporary moral sensibilities. At the heart of his critique is his tale of evolutionary moral development. For Dawkins, our cooperative convictions are justifiable by virtue of their adaptive

value and their contribution to advantageous species selection. Religious morality has failed, not just because it is wrong as such, but also because it is less adaptive in our current climate than secular morality. So the way of treating others that Dawkins favors is an ever-shifting dynamic that depends upon the 'Zeitgeist' of the age. For Dawkins, 'right' behavior is a function of a culture's prevailing convictions and it is traceable to evolutionary processes. Dawkins's belief that social arrangements are valuable just insofar as they offer local evolutionary advantages gives him no hopes for ever attaining any qualitatively 'better' ideal of social justice. He believes that there is no divine guidance or providence behind our decision-making efforts. So his hard-nosed tale of human insignificance is not at the end of the day a story that is likely to promote inspired forms of political cooperation.

CHRISTIANITY, STABILITY, AND CONFLICT

Again, Christianity also promotes a desire for political stability. One way is via its notion of non-negotiable moral parameters. Christians are taught that God has given them normative guidelines to structure their social and political interactions. The purpose of these guidelines is to promote human flourishing: we ought to love each other and not to be deceitful, to be kind to each other and not to cheat each other or take exploitative advantage of each other, to honor each other's dignity and to be peaceful. For Christians, such moral boundaries are not changeable or easily capable of being discarded – whatever the current Zeitgeist. Since they are not malleable via human artifice, it is natural for them to facilitate political stability. They are natural barriers to the ever-present dangers of conflict and anarchy.

Stability is almost always a good thing in liberal democracies. In today's world there is an extraordinary amount of belief and behavioral pluralism. Day by day we are being drawn closer to each other via globalization. Today there are an enormous number of belief systems, in close and uncomfortable quarters with each other. The natural result of such pluralism is instability – in the society, in our personal belief systems, and in our ability to connect with our neighbors. Not surprisingly, political conflict has now come to be a

key concern in Anglo-American philosophy. John Rawls exemplifies this concern when he delineates in *Political Liberalism* a cooperative model which he thinks is endorsable by religious and non-religious persons alike. His intent is to situate liberal democracies upon an inclusive foundation, and not upon a modus vivendi. My contention in this regard is that Christianity, rightly understood, is conducive to the stability that the philosophers are seeking. It teaches respect for authority, and it discourages deeds that would undermine the social order or that would be contrary to neighborly love and kindness.

Is it similarly possible for Dawkins to promote stability? The truth, in this regard, seems to be that Dawkins's social vision is inherently unstable because its critique of religiously-informed social arrangements is not at the end of the day predicated upon firm cooperative beliefs. The first and most prominent upshot of Dawkins's evolutionary tale is just that there is no particular morality that is correct or that ought to trump our other cooperative principles. Let me stress this point again: at the end of the day, Dawkins does not believe in stable normative guidelines. When Dawkins asserts that the principles of morality change in accordance with the Zeitgeist, he is suggesting that the morality of the present might in fact become inferior at some point in the future, if and when the times change. For Dawkins, this is precisely what has happened to the morality of the past: the cooperative opinions of past generations are inferior to our own because the Zeitgeist today has moved on. What once was 'right' for our ancestors is now no longer right for us; and what now is right for us will one day no longer be 'right' for our descendants. But Dawkins's belief that the moral 'right' is ever-changing is a story that leaves him in a precarious position to defend his own cooperative opinions. Social cooperation becomes unstable and unpredictable if one believes, as Dawkins does, that that which is 'right' is changing with the times.

More particularly, since Dawkins believes that social justice is a product of human artifice, he believes also that it is changeable via artifice. And for Dawkins there is no robust hand of divine providence to channel that change process in constructive directions. At most, providence for Dawkins is the invisible hand of evolutionary adaptation. And yet if Dawkins's secular evolutionary tale is right,

what reason is there for us to believe that its selection mechanisms are adapting us for more stable and successful forms of political cooperation? Dawkins, in committing himself to moral views that are more malleable than those of his theistic counterparts, is also committing himself to less certain social foundations.

CONCLUSION

The upshot, in brief, is just that there are at least two virtues that are valuable today in the liberal democratic public square – hope and a desire for stability – and that are robustly traceable to Christian doctrinal commitments. In principle, at least, Christianity offers promising cooperative tools – even if in practice there have been theists who have inappropriately applied such tools. The basis for moral cooperation that is available to theists is every bit as good as that which is available to a non-theist like Dawkins. In grounding their cooperation in the promises of a benevolent and providential deity, Christianity is offering its adherents a trustworthy social foundation.

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What Is Wrong with the New Atheism?

Robert B. Stewart

The "New Atheists" are the rock stars of the unbelieving world. Their books are New York Times bestsellers. They are the speakers that secular masses pine over. So what is the New Atheism? "The New Atheism" is a term coined by Gary Wolf in his *Wired* magazine article, "The Church of the Non-Believers," to describe a new sort of atheism, led by Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, and the late Christopher Hitchens. The New Atheism is as fundamentalistic and evangelistic as any evangelical church. Of course, these four are merely the brightest lights of a much larger group. The rise of think tanks or "centers" like the *Center for Inquiry* or the *Center for Naturalism* shows just how persuasive they have been. Wolf maintains that New Atheists are issuing a call to action "to help exorcise this debilitating curse: the curse of faith."[1] The consistent message of the New Atheists is that: (1) belief in God is irrational in an age of science because science has replaced religion and/or philosophy as the primary way to find truth and meaning in life; (2) "faith" is belief in spite of and sometimes even because of a lack of evidence; and (3) religion is dangerous.

I cannot in this brief article fully analyze or critique the claims of the New Atheists. Therefore my intention is to point out a few problems with their position. I will focus my criticism on issues arising from their view of science.

[1] Gary Wolf, "The Church of the Non-Believers," http://www.wired.com/2006/11/atheism/ accessed November 4, 2015.

PROBLEM #1: FREE WILL

The New Atheists are up front about our lack of free will. Sam Harris states it explicitly: "Free will is an illusion. Our wills are simply not of our own making. Thoughts and intentions emerge from background causes of which we are unaware and over which we exert no conscious control. We do not have the freedom we think we have."[2] (Ironically, the publisher of Harris's book is Free Press.) Or consider this example from the website of the Center for Naturalism.

> From a naturalistic perspective . . . [h]uman beings act the way they do because of the various influences that shape them, whether these be biological or social, genetic or environmental. We do not have the capacity to act outside the causal connections that link us in every respect to the rest of the world. This means we do not have what many people think of as *free will*, being able to cause our behavior without our being fully caused in turn.[3]

Not being free has devastating implications for other important areas of life. It impacts things as important as ethics. Consider the following, again from the Center for Naturalism.

> From a naturalistic perspective, behavior arises out of the interaction between individuals and their environment, not from a freely willing self. . . . Therefore individuals don't bear ultimate originative responsibility for their actions, in the sense of being their first cause. Given the circumstances both inside and outside the body, they couldn't have done other than what they did. Nevertheless, we must still hold individuals responsible, in the sense of applying rewards and sanctions, so that their behavior stays more or less within the range of what we deem acceptable. This is, partially, how people learn to act ethically.[4]

The question is this: how can we hold anyone responsible if they are not responsible for their actions and "couldn't have done other than what they did"? This seems hopelessly confused. Furthermore,

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[2] Sam Harris, *Free Will* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 5.
[3] http://www.naturalism.org/worldview-naturalism/tenets-of-naturalism accessed November 9, 2015.
[4] Ibid.

if it is true that "they couldn't have done other than what they did," then why do we call Francis of Assisi a saint and Jeffrey Dahmer a monster? Why do we praise the sacrifice of one and lock up the other? In fact, if we cannot do other than what we do, then theists and atheists seem to be in the same intellectual boat—we are all just determined to believe what we believe; we cannot do otherwise. So why write books intended to change another's worldview, books like *The God Delusion*? New Atheist doctrine seems then to imply that there can be no such thing as persuasion. In this way their position undermines rationality.

Please note that the New Atheists cannot reply to this point by saying that I am just denying their position because my desire for Christianity to be true causes me to stubbornly refuse to accept it. If they are right about our lacking free will, then there is no such thing as being stubborn; I am just doing what the circumstances inside and outside my body dictate that I will. On the other hand, the Christian worldview teaches that we are morally responsible because we are free and capable of choosing whether to believe or not. Those who would deny that we are free and at the same time attempt to persuade others to choose to join them are presuming something to which they are not entitled. This seems disingenuous.

Lacking freedom also has huge implications for our *human relationships*. Just how do we make sense of this thing we call love? If our actions are the result of "the various influences that shape us, whether these be biological or social, genetic or environmental," then why does your husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend, love you? Why do you love your significant other? Does he or she do so freely? Do you? It is hard to see how in a naturalist world. How can you be confident that your significant other will love you tomorrow, or that you will love them? It seems then that love is simply a byproduct of our biology and upbringing. In a very real sense, then, in a naturalist world we can say that love is the fruit of our genes and our experiences. But so is mental illness. How then are we to distinguish between love and psychosis?

My point is that these claims are counterintuitive; they run counter to several of our strongest perceptions. This does not prove that they are wrong. Intuition is not a perfect guide; we know that some of our intuitions are mistaken. But it is generally a very foolish thing to ignore your intuitions without very good evidence to the contrary.

PROBLEM #2: CONSCIOUSNESS

Thomas Nagel is one of the world's most respected philosophers; he is also an atheist. Yet he sees clearly that this new breed of atheist materialism has serious deficiencies. Human consciousness, that sense of being your own unique self, experiencing your own feelings and thoughts, feelings and thoughts that you and you alone have access to, poses a serious problem for the New Atheists. Nagel is refreshingly forthright.

> Consciousness is the most conspicuous obstacle to a comprehensive naturalism that relies only on the resources of physical science. The existence of consciousness seems to imply that the physical description of the universe, in spite of its richness and explanatory power, is only part of the truth, and that the natural order is far less austere than it would be if physics and chemistry accounted for everything.[5]

In a dialogue with Steven Pinker, Richard Dawkins had this to say about consciousness.

> Neither Steve Pinker nor I can explain human subjective consciousness—what philosophers call qualia. In How the Mind Works Steve elegantly sets out the problem of subjective consciousness, and asks where it comes from and what's the explanation? Then he's honest enough to say, "Beats the heck out of me." That is an honest thing to say, and I echo it. We don't know. We don't understand it.[6]

Consider what naturalist Ned Block has to say concerning consciousness:

> We have no conception of our physical or functional nature that allows us to understand how it could explain our subjective experience. . . . But in the case of consciousness we have nothing—zilch—worthy of being called a research programme, nor are there any substantive proposals about how to go about starting one. . . Researchers are stumped.[7]

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[5] Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 35.

[6] Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker, "Is Science Killing The Soul?" http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/dawkins_pinker/debate_p4.html. Accessed 5 March 2008.

[7] Ned Block, "Consciousness," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Mind*, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, ed. Samuel Guttenplan (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 211.

Nagel says this:

> The existence of consciousness is both one of the most familiar and one of the most astounding things about the world. No conception of the natural order that does not reveal it as something to be expected can aspire even to the outline of completeness. And if physical science, whatever it may have to say about the origin of life, leaves us necessarily in the dark about consciousness, that shows that it cannot provide the basic form of intelligibility for this world. There must be a very different way in which things as they are make sense, and that includes the way the physical world is, since the problem cannot be quarantined in the mind.[8]

There must be a very different way in which things as they are make sense, indeed.

One very different way to get around the problem of consciousness is to deny that there is any such thing as a mental state. This approach, known as eliminative materialism, does not simply say that the brain produces conscious mental states; that would hardly be new. Eliminative materialism insists that *there are no mental states*. Simply put, there are no thoughts, feelings, or desires; there are only the data with which neuroscientists work. Paul and Patricia Churchland are husband and wife philosophers who affirm this view. In a *New Yorker* magazine article on their work, they write this:

> One afternoon recently, Paul says, he was home making dinner when Pat burst in the door, having come straight from a frustrating faculty meeting. "She said, 'Paul, don't speak to me, my serotonin levels have hit bottom, my brain is awash in glucocorticoids, my blood vessels are full of adrenaline, and if it weren't for my endogenous opiates I'd have driven the car into a tree on the way home. My dopamine levels need lifting. Pour me a Chardonnay, and I'll be down in a minute.'"[9]

Though I take this to be tongue in cheek humor, eliminative materialists would see this as progress. I see it as dehumanizing.

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[8] Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 53.

[9] Quoted from Larissa MacFarquhar, "Two Heads: A Marriage Devoted to the Mind-Body Problem," in *The New Yorker* (February 12, 2007), 69.

PROBLEM #3: AD HOC SOLUTIONS

Ad hoc solutions are not truly solutions to anything, they are pseudo-solutions, desperate attempts to prop up an obvious hole in a theory; they exist to compensate for anomalies not anticipated by the theory in its unmodified form. Philosophers and scientists are rightfully skeptical of theories that rely on unsupported adjustments to sustain them. Generally ad hoc solutions involve the addition of an extraneous hypothesis to save a theory from being falsified. This leads us to the idea of memes.

Perhaps the most controversial feature of contemporary atheism is the concept of a meme. Richard Dawkins first introduced the concept in his book *The Selfish Gene*. Simply put a meme is a cultural replicator. Suggested examples of memes include such disparate things as thoughts, ideas, theories, practices, habits, songs, dances, and languages. Accordingly memes propagate themselves and can move through a culture in a manner similar to the behavior of a virus. In coining the term Dawkins wrote:

> We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. "Mimeme" comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like "gene". I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to *meme*. If it is any consolation, it could alternatively be thought of as being related to "memory", or to the French word *même*. It should be pronounced to rhyme with "cream".[10]

Several challenges arise in connection to memetic theory. One is to show how memetics is truly an empirical discipline. Simon Conway Morris, professor of evolutionary palaeobiology at Cambridge, holds that memes seem to have no place in serious scientific reflection.

> [M]emes are trivial, to be banished by simple mental exercises. In any wider context they are hopelessly, if not hilariously, simplistic. To conjure up memes not only reveals a strange imprecision of thought, but, as Anthony O'Hear has remarked, if memes really existed they would ultimately deny the reality of reflective thought.[11]

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[10] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 11.
[11] Simon Conway Morris, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 324.

It is my contention that memes are what they appear to be: an ad hoc solution. When asked to give evidence for memes at the 2007 Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum in Faith and Culture, Dennett responded that it was an accepted scientific belief and offered his article in *The Encyclopedia of Evolution* as one line of evidence supporting his position (it was not his sole point on the matter). But what kind of evidence is this? If this is a legitimate response, I see no reason why I should not be allowed to hold that there is good evidence for the resurrection of Jesus because I wrote the article on the resurrection of Jesus in the *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*.[12] If an article with the imprint of a prestigious British university press is all that is required to prove a hypothesis, then the matter seems settled. Frankly, I am advocating no such thing; it seems to be a category mistake. Simply put, literary evidence is not sufficient evidence to confirm a scientific theory—and with good reason.

One must remember that the concept of memes is based on an analogy between genes (or viruses) and ideas. An analogy is a type of supposal, a way of likening one thing to another. Analogies are not evidence that *something is so*, but rather illustrations of how *something could be so*. Analogies are tremendously useful things in philosophy, science, and history; positing them often allows us to make progress. Unfortunately analogies can also distort our view of reality and lead us down many dead-end paths. Remember that scientists in the late 19th century routinely posited the luminiferous ether—the hypothetical substance that was rigid in relationship to electromagnetic waves but completely permeable to matter—based upon the supposed analogy between light and sound. The idea was analogically plausible but mistaken. Worse, the idea of ether actually held back scientific progress. Fortunately Einstein built upon the work of Michelson and Morley and disproved it in his special theory of relativity.

Those who appeal to memes to dismiss belief in God depend upon a hypothetical, unobserved entity, which can be dispensed with in order to make sense of what we observe. But is not that actually a basic atheist critique of belief in God—an unobserved hypothesis which can easily be dismissed?

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[12] Robert B. Stewart, "Resurrection (the) of Jesus," in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Alister McGrath holds three doctorates from Oxford University, the first in Molecular Biophysics, the second in Theology, and the third in Intellectual History. He asks the following question of those who offer memes as a scientific solution:

> [H]as anyone actually seen these things, whether leaping from brain to brain, or just hanging out? The issue, it must be noted, has nothing to do with religion. It is whether the meme can be considered to be a viable scientific hypothesis, when there is no clear operational definition of a meme, no testable model for how memes influence culture and why standard selection models are not adequate, a general tendency to ignore the sophisticated social science models of information transfer already in place, and a high degree of circularity in the explanation of the power of memes.[13]

Memes fail with regard to several key criteria by which scientific theories are judged, a few of which are clarity, simplicity, and testability. In my opinion, the evidence for belief in God is far better than the evidence for belief in memes.

CONCLUSION

There is much more that I could say. I could show how Dawkins and others among the New Atheists make statements about science that have not come close to being confirmed. Their position is not so much science as it is scientism. I could point out that when they lapse into scientism, they sound very much like the religious fundamentalists they lampoon for having faith, which in their view is essentially a lack of evidence. I could point out that they regularly focus on the evils of religion while ignoring the massive amount of good that has been done by religious people, and saying little or nothing about the evil that has been done in the name of secular progress. I could go on.

I recognize that I have not made a positive case for Christianity, or even for theism. That was not my intention. One cannot do everything in a brief article such as this. I do hope, however, that having read my criticisms readers will think long and hard before buying what the New Atheists are pushing.

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[13] Alister McGrath, "Opening Remarks," in *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath and Daniel Dennett in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 31.

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The Classic Design Argument for God's Existence

Hume's Critique, Reid's Response

Melissa Cain Travis

Is the design argument for the existence of God obsolete? Many claim so, and the alleged demise is often traced back to the philosophy of David Hume, whose 1779 *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* excoriated natural theology. Agnostic philosopher of science Michael Ruse has remarked that when it comes to the classic design argument—the so-called "watchmaker thesis"—Hume's critique knocked it down "like a house of cards."[1] Or so the story goes. What has gone under-appreciated, perhaps unnoticed, is the potent response that was offered by Hume's contemporary, Thomas Reid. A fresh evaluation reveals that the design argument for God's existence remains a viable instrument in the apologist's tool chest.

In his *Natural History of Religion*, Hume says that "the whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment" and "a purpose, an intention, a design, is evident in everything."[2] Of course, Hume did not see this as any reason to think design perceptions reflected the truth about the world—he was a thoroughgoing skeptic. However, it is key to note that he viewed his critique as being independent of his skepticism.

The objections Hume presents in the *Dialogues* encompass both

[1] Michael Ruse, *Darwin and Design* (President and Fellows of Harvard college, 2003), 27.
[2] David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, 1. Accessed July 14, 2015 at http://stoa.usp.br/briannaloch

the analogical and the inductive forms of the classical design argument. Put simply, the analogical form points out features of some natural phenomena that are similar to features of human artifacts and then concludes that since human artifacts are products of intelligent agency, the natural phenomena in question must also come from an intelligent agent. The inductive form bases the design conclusion upon all previous experience of human designers and their products. It claims that, because products with certain features are known, by uniform experience, to come from intelligent designers, it can be concluded that natural phenomena with artifact-like features also came from an intelligent designer. Hume's critique of the former is that the analogy between human design products and natural phenomena (especially the universe itself) is too weak, that the cases are not similar enough to justify concluding that there is a mind behind the natural world, thus the argument for a designer based upon the features of the natural world is a very weak analogy. His contention against the inductive form of the argument is that we can only infer causes with which we have actual experience when attempting to explain known effects. Upon observation of complexity, harmony of parts, and adjustment of means to ends, we may postulate a designing agency, but only to the extent that the object in question "has been experienced to proceed from that principle."[3] Past direct experience of the same species of cause is necessary if we are to infer that cause from any of its alleged effects.

It is not uncommon for today's opponents of design to employ the Humean objections. Robert Pennock claims that as soon as one attempts to move from a phenomenon in nature to an intelligent supernatural agent, the very concept of design "loses any connection to reality as we know it or can know it scientifically."[4] Pennock does not see how we could justify positing a cause of which we have no observational knowledge. Similarly, John Wilkins and Wesley Elsberry emphasize what they see as an "in-principle difference between rarefied and ordinary design inferences, based on the background knowledge available about ordinary, but not rarefied,

[3] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, in *Classics of Western Philosophy* 7th edition, ed. Steven Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett, Inc.: 2006), 863.
[4] Robert Pennock, *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics* (MIT: 2001), 654.

design agencies."[5] In other words, without first-hand knowledge about a supernatural ("rarefied") designing agent, we are unable to draw an analogy between that alleged cause and human designers, despite any similarities between human artifacts and qualities of nature. Iris Fry has also issued a Humean objection to design analogies, claiming that "if the intelligent agent is supernatural, it cannot be compared to humans."[6] Fry accuses design proponents of begging the question in favor of theism—assuming what they are attempting to prove by setting up an analogy between human intelligence and an alleged designer's intelligence.[7]

By way of response, advocates of the design argument should consider the approach taken by Thomas Reid, whose lecture series on natural theology (1780) includes rejoinders to Hume's objections. Reid begins by giving a nicely detailed exploration of what he considers marks of designedness in the natural world. He describes man's digestive and circulatory systems, each comprised of specialized parts that operate harmoniously for a specific purpose, and the construction of the eye, "a small ball fixed in a socket [by which] we can perceive the fixed stars and the various objects around us by means of the refraction of the rays of light."[8] He maintains that "it would be impossible to enumerate every mark of wisdom" that can be observed in the animal kingdom.[9] For Reid, "marks of wisdom" include both regularities in nature and the integration of necessary parts in living systems to achieve certain functional ends.

It may seem that Reid is simply defending the analogical design argument by describing and marveling over these "marks of wisdom" in nature; but close examination of his language in the lectures and comparison with his terminology in *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* demonstrate a decidedly two-pronged approach. According to Reid, belief in an intelligent artificer of the world is epistemically foundational, a belief that is

[5] John Wilkins and Wesley Elsberry, "The Advantages of Theft over Toil: The Design Inference and Arguing from Ignorance," *Biology and Philosophy* 16 (November 2001), 711-724.
[6] Iris Fry, *The Emergence of Life on Earth* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press: 2000), 206.
[7] Ibid., 205.
[8] Thomas Reid, *Thomas Reid's Lectures on Natural Theology* ed. Elmer Duncan (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 35-37, 40.
[9] Ibid., 35.

not reached by way of analogical *or* inductive reasoning; it is what he famously refers to as a *common sense* belief. We trust such beliefs to contain accurate information about reality; even the skeptic who denies this must live as if it is so. The design conclusion is, according to Reid, one of these common sense beliefs, a conclusion we cannot avoid by virtue of how we are made. We simply *see that* there is this designedness in natural phenomena. In his *Inquiry*, he explains that no premises are involved; the mind reacts to indicators in nature by forming an immediate belief. He holds that "the mind passes instantly to the things signified, without making the least reflection upon the sign, or even perceiving that there is any such thing."[10] Recall Hume's similar recognition of man's propensity to simply see design in nature; the major point of divergence is that Reid believes these automatic design perceptions are reliable truth indicators whereas Hume does not. Reid asserts that the existence of a designer *necessarily follows* from actual designedness, and therefore, belief in a designer is itself part of man's first principle knowledge "learned neither by reasoning nor by experience."[11] Says Reid, "It is on this principle then, that my argument is grounded. There are clear marks of wisdom and design in the formation and government of the world, must they not arise then from a designing cause?"[12]

Contrary to Hume's skepticism, Reid's common sense philosophy deems our faculties a reliable conduit of truth about the external world; he points out a serious predicament that arises from Hume's claim that these immediate perceptions are not reliable sources of truth and that reason alone should be trusted: "Why, Sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception; they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another?"[13] Why think that human reason has access to truth any more so than human perception, since their ultimate origin is the same? Reid's challenge holds whether the "shop" from which the human mind came is thought to be divine or natural. There seem to be only two options; either trust both human faculties to a similar extent, or distrust them both entirely.

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[10] Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* ed. Derek Brookes (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 81.
[11] Reid, *Lectures*, 54.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Reid, *Lectures*, 169.

Contemporary skeptics of design may respond that the reason we cannot trust the design beliefs produced by perception is that we now have a defeater for agent-driven design: the full capability of unguided natural selection, acting upon random genetic mutations, to produce the appearance of design in living things. Hume made no such claim about the power of natural mechanisms; in keeping with his skeptical epistemology, he expressed a staunch agnosticism based upon our finite knowledge of nature. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Reid had a reply for the materialist allegation that natural processes are a sufficient explanation for the origin and features of natural phenomena, and it is a response that remains valid, despite any advances in evolutionary theory. Reid explains that a physical cause of a natural phenomenon in no way rules out a final cause—there being purpose and intention behind the constitution of the phenomenon. He says, "The physical cause hunts out the laws of Nature from which the phenomena flow...but the final cause again hunts out the end which Nature had in view. Thus, the end of the eye is for seeing, the feet for walking, and so on."[14] Reid recognized the necessary link between a phenomenon having a final cause and having an intelligent designer. Note that he is not using circular reasoning here; rather, he is pointing out that the physical workings and/or origin of a phenomenon say nothing of its teleology, a point C.S. Lewis later made in *Mere Christianity,* when he said that "whether there is anything behind the things science observes—something of a different kind—this is not a scientific question."[15]

In addition to defending basic design beliefs and the analogical design argument, Reid directly challenges Hume's objection to the inductive form of the argument. Hume contends that because we have no experience with a transcendent designer, we are not justified in inferring that species of cause from the observed phenomena of nature. In our uniform experience, argues Hume, there does seem to be a constant conjunction between human designers and human artifacts, but that conjunction cannot be applied to nature's origin. Reid heartily disagrees, arguing that inferring a designer from marks of design can quite reasonably be based upon observed effects, and that these effects are sufficient grounds for assigning certain

[14] Reid, *Lectures*, 55.
[15] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 23.

attributes, such as wisdom and intelligence, to their cause. In fact, this is all we can do even in the case of *human* designers, because we do not actually have direct knowledge of human wisdom: "No man ever saw wisdom, and if he does not conclude from the marks of it, he can form no conclusions respecting anything of his fellow creatures."[16] Thus, if one denies the validity of the design conclusion drawn inductively from marks of wisdom in nature, he must also deny the validity of the "other minds" conclusion drawn from the marks of wisdom in human products and behaviors.

For Reid, the designing intelligence responsible for the universe is God. Thus, his rejoinder runs head-on into another of Hume's objections: that positing God as the mind behind the material world is unjustified anthropomorphism, and is degrading to the Deity. Hume argues that imagining we can comprehend God, that we can have any understanding of his nature, is to bring him down to human level: "By representing the Deity as intelligible and comprehensible, and so similar to a human mind, we are guilty of the grossest and most narrow partiality, and make ourselves the model of the whole universe."[17] We cannot suppose that God's rationality is anything like ours, so we cannot presume that what our minds perceive as marks of design are anything like the marks that would result from God's mind. In his *Natural History of Religion*, Hume lamented this "universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object, those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious."[18] A successful design argument would, in Hume's estimation, make God finite, since we are only justified in inferring, at most, the level of wisdom in a cause that we see in its effects.[19] When we observe harmful or allegedly substandard natural phenomena, for instance, we must conclude that the designer of the world could not do better. But leaving aside the issue of natural evil, mankind cannot glean any knowledge of God from nature in the first place, as we are hopelessly limited by our imperfect human ideas and capacities.

Reid counters Hume's contention with two analogies. First, suppose you went on a journey, and along the way stopped to ask a

[16] Reid, *Lectures*, 56.
[17] Hume, *Dialogues*, 869.
[18] Hume, *History of Natural Religion*, 7.
[19] Hume, *Dialogues*, 890.

man for directions to a certain town. The man responds succinctly and correctly. However, this would not allow you to conclude that the man did not know anything about the local geography beyond what he verbally indicated. Reid asks, "Am I therefore to conclude that his understanding just enable him to answer my question and neither more nor less? Surely this would be absurd—the natural conclusion is, that he has such a degree, how much more I do not know."[20] Similarly, suppose you were to converse with a man for only half an hour upon a scholarly subject, and discover that he is quite knowledgeable on the topic. You would not be justified in concluding that what he said over the course of that half hour exhausted his knowledge on the topic.[21] This being the case, one cannot observe the universe and its limitations or so-called imperfections and conclude a designer of finite wisdom and power.

But what of the first part of Hume's objection—that anthropomorphizing God, making him in any respect comprehensible, is unjustifiable? Reid openly acknowledges our human constraints:

> The best notions of the divine Maker which we can form are imperfect and inadequate and are all drawn from what we know of our own Mind. We cannot form an idea of any attribute intellectual or moral as belonging to the deity, of which there is not some faint resemblance or image in ourselves.[22]

Yes, our conceptions are "imperfect and inadequate," but Reid contends that there is a key correspondence between the mind of man and the mind of man's maker, a "resemblance or image" that we bear. First of all, God's attribute of omniscience can be concluded by reason, as it is a perfection and God is defined as the most perfect being.[23] It follows from this that God has perfect knowledge of mankind: "The Supreme Being knows all his creatures and all their qualities...the artificer knows his own workmanship."[24] If this is so, then God knows all that man knows and he knows the *manner* in which man knows it. God and man share the property of being rational *knowers*.[25] There

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[20] Reid, *Lectures*, 92.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 2.
[23] Ibid., 75.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Alvin Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief, 24 and 65. Accessed July 14, 2015 at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/plantinga/warrant3.html.

is overlap in their knowledge and the nature of that knowledge, such that man has access to some of the content of God's knowledge. In the middle of his discussion of the marks of wisdom in nature, Reid touches on this idea. He pauses to ask, "He that made the eye, shall he not see? He that made the ear shall he not hear? He that gave a man understanding shall he not understand?"[26]

In order to deflect the anthropomorphism critique, the design proponent only needs to establish that the designer's rationality has some shared property and content with man's and that this rationality is somehow exhibited in the created order. One of Reid's characterizations of "marks of design" in nature is directly relevant here. In his discussion of astronomy, he highlights Newton's theory of planetary motion as an example of rational precision in nature:

> For Newton has demonstrated that supposing this power [gravity] to take place, then the consequences would be, that this together with a projectile force will make them describe elliptical curves, and that by this law they would describe equal areas in equal times and that the square of the periodic times would be in proportion to the cubes of the distances. Thus we see the whole system regulated by exact mathematical rules. We see those producing the most accurate and constant operations. Now can we seek stronger marks of wisdom and design than this?[27]

He goes on to compare the gravity-driven, clockwork solar system to the multi-part, finely-tuned mechanism of a watch, which is governed by one great spring and, incidentally, produced by a skillful agent.[28] What is significant here is that Reid emphasizes the mathematical nature of the laws governing planetary motion, as this is not something that we simply perceive with our sensory faculties; rather, it is a quality we discover through rational investigation. This shows that he was not dismissive of efforts to reason to design from certain evidences. Perhaps a viable response to the Humean anthropomorphism objection is that, rather than assigning human qualities to the Creator, the design proponent is discovering reflections of the Creator's qualities in man and the physical world.

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[26] Reid, *Lectures*, 41. Allusion to Psalm 94:9.
[27] Ibid., 21.
[28] Ibid.

As Plantinga puts it, "God created both us and our world in such a way that there is a certain fit or match between the world and our cognitive faculties...a match that enables us to know something, indeed a great deal, about the world--and also about ourselves and God himself."[29]

Why should there be this strange resonance between man's rationality and the deep structure of the natural world if there is no real design behind things? Naturalistic evolutionary explanations are woefully inadequate; the aptitude for higher abstract mathematics, for example, has no discernable survival value, and, as Plantinga has humorously noted, no apparent sexual selective advantage, either: "What prehistoric female would be interested in a male who wanted to think about whether a set could be equal in cardinality to its power set, instead of where to look for game?"[30] The alternative naturalistic thesis, that this higher aptitude is a spin-off of the evolutionary process, "sounds pretty flimsy, and the easy and universal availability of such explanations makes them wholly implausible" says Plantinga.[31] However, positing an intelligent designer of both man and the rest of the world has great explanatory power; it brings a coherence to the entire picture. The harmony between man's aptitude for mathematics-driven scientific discovery and the applicability of mathematics to the cosmos loses none of its grandeur, but much of its mystery in light of a three-way resonance between God's mind, the mind of man, and the created order.

Today's defendants of the design argument would greatly benefit from an awareness of Reid's approach. The inclusion and development of Reidian ideas in the works of eminent philosophers, such as Alvin Plantinga, attest to Reid's enduring value for the project of natural theology. Humean objections turn out to lack much of the force that has been attributed to them and contemporary accusations of question-begging are effectively dissolved. Reid's common sense epistemology, his arguments for the reliability of human cognition, the nature of the material world (the living and nonliving parts), and what we can know about the nature of the Creator based upon the created order bring a remarkable coherence to the design paradigm.

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[29] Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 269.
[30] Ibid., 287.
[31] Ibid.

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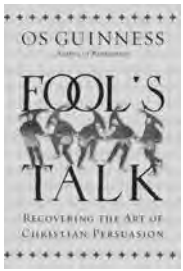
Anatomy of Unbelief

Louis Markos



Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion, By Os Guinness. IVP Books, 2015. 270 pages, hardcover, $22.00.

In *Screwtape Letters #13*, senior devil Screwtape responds to the fears of his nephew and junior tempter, Wormwood, over the sudden, unexpected repentance, renewal, and re-conversion of his human patient. Wormwood feels sure that he has lost his prey, but Screwtape counsels him to do all he can to prevent his patient from doing anything with his new spiritual resolve: "As long as he does not convert it into action, it does not matter how much he thinks about this new repentance. Let the little brute wallow in it. Let him, if he has any bent that way, write a book about it."[1]

Os Guinness, a prolific author, speaker, and social critic who founded the Trinity Forum, serves as a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution, and is a guest scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Studies, has thankfully never allowed himself to

[1] C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 57.

fall prey to Screwtape's insidious methods. Indeed, near the start of *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*, he shares with us a promise he made to God when he graduated from Oxford: "I promised that I would always *do* apologetics rather than simply write about it, that I would do it *before* writing about it, and that I would do it *more* than writing about it" (38).

True to his promise, Guinness has spent a long fruitful career persuading individuals and groups of the truth, goodness, and beauty of the gospel in a world that is both modern and postmodern. In *Fool's Talk* he has synthesized, not only all that he has read and written about apologetics for the last four decades, but all that he has learned on his feet from trying to persuade everyone, from liberal theologians to postmodern seekers to angry atheists, of the soundness of the Christian worldview and the salvific power of Christ.

What Guinness brings to *Fool's Talk*, and what makes it so unique among the dozens of excellent apologetics books on the market, is a keen sense of the proper place and role of apologetics. Apologetics, he insists, cannot and should not be divorced from evangelism; the former must not be pursued as an end in itself but must ever prepare the way for the latter. Just as importantly, those who take seriously the Great Commission must never reduce their witness to a one-size-fits-all apologetic that strives after the same utility, efficiency, and repeatability as McDonald's or Disney World.

If we are to reach a dying world for Christ, we must spend less time polishing our presentations and more time digging into the hearts, souls, and minds of those who so desperately need the gospel. If we really did that, we would quickly realize that one of the chief obstacles to apologetics-evangelism is the fact that so many people have no idea that they are in need of the gospel.

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Of course, Guinness is not unique in noting that the lost lack a sense of their own lostness. What is unique is the way he carefully unpacks that lack in a long chapter aptly titled "Anatomy of Unbelief." Having first exposed, in a non-curmudgeonly fashion, how our age

is obsessed with technology, experts, formulas, and how-to manuals, Guinness goes on to put his finger on the core issue that keeps so many people from faith: "For every thinker who desires to conform his thinking to reality, there are others whose desire is clearly to conform reality to their thinking" (80).

Behind Guinness's analysis, there stands, by his own confession, the monumental work of Peter Berger, Francis Schaeffer, and C. S. Lewis. I suspect that Guinness has in mind here Lewis's penetrating insight into the difference between the ethos of the Middle Ages and that of post-Enlightenment Europe. "For the wise men of old," Lewis writes in Chapter Three of *The Abolition of Man*, "the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men: the solution is a technique."[2]

Building on this prideful refusal to accept the claims of reality (and its Creator) on our lives, and then folding in to it Berger's keen sociological analysis of modern relativism, the more on-the-ground dialogues that Schaeffer had with discontented atheists in the 1960s and 70s, and the counter-cultural witness of the Old Testament's prophets and of Romans 1, Guinness constructs a diagnosis for understanding the nature and process of unbelief, especially as it has been trumpeted in the work of the new atheists.

The downward journey toward unbelief begins with a "*willful abuse of truth*" that seeks to suppress, exploit, and invert the truth (85). In the end, this leads to what Guinness calls "*a deliberate act of deception that ends in its own self-deception*" (89). Unafraid to call this process of self-deception by its proper theological name, sin, Guinness reveals the driving motivation behind it:

> If sin is the claim to 'the right to myself,' it includes the claim to 'the right to my view of things.' And since we are each finite, 'my view of things' is necessarily restricted and simply cannot see the full picture. We therefore turn a blind eye to all other ways of seeing things that do not fit ours, and especially to God's view of things (89).

[2] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 88.

In a witty metaphor, Guinness compares apologists who try to win over self-deceived unbelievers by continually restating and repackaging their arguments to tourists who think that non-English speakers will understand them if they repeat what they said "more slowly and loudly" (114). Rather than fool ourselves into thinking the right method or technique will convince willful atheists, we need to "focus on the inescapable tension and dynamic conflict inherent in unbelief" (93).

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Once we see, really see, that, we will realize that reason alone cannot reach such people, for their willful disobedience and self-deception prevent them, despite their protestations to the contrary, from being purely neutral or disinterested. What we as apologists must focus on, therefore, is not perfecting apologetical knock-out punches, but on grasping "the inherent tension between the truth and the falseness in all unbelief" (95). Only then will we be able to discern the "difference between what unbelievers assert they are and who they really are" (95).

According to Guinness, unbelievers deal with this tension in one of two ways: by moving toward what he terms the dilemma pole or the diversion pole. Nietzsche offers the prime example of one who chose the dilemma pole. Unwilling to sweep the tensions caused by unbelief under the rug, and willing to say true to the courage of his (anti-) convictions, he pressed onward to the logical (and dark) end of his unbelief. He even relished in taking potshots at fellow atheists who, like those from Victorian England, cravenly chose the diversion pole and pretended that there was meaning and purpose in the world despite their refusal to acknowledge the only final source of such meaning and purpose. That is to say, in the face of the survival-of-the-fittest determinism demanded by their atheism, they, along with their diversionary heirs, continued to act *as if* morality, beauty, and innate human dignity were real things.

Both strategies are open to the unbeliever; however, Guinness makes it clear that far more people choose the diversion pole. For every Sartre—whom Guinness describes as "more consistent to

atheism and also more cold"—there are dozens who choose the way of Camus—who was "inconsistent but warm" (98). And yet, Guinness notes, those who gravitate toward the diversion pole, though more numerous, are less understood. And that is problematic, for the number of diversionary unbelievers has skyrocketed in our age, thanks to our media- and advertising-soaked world which provides unbelievers with endless distractions from pondering the consequences of their atheistic worldview. Indeed, the kinds of distractions once reserved only for royalty are now widely available to the middle class and even the poor.

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What then are we to do to wake up such dishonest, but comfortable, unbelievers from their slumber? What Guinness proposes lies midway between Socrates' determination to be a gadfly on the lethargic horse of state and Francis Schaeffer's method of "taking the roof" off of unbelievers so as to force them to confront directly the implications of the godless universe they claim to believe in.

It is time, writes Guinness, to turn the tables on all those new atheists who claim that they, and not the Christians, are the ones who are willing to look reality in the face. We must force them to really stand face-to-face with reality, not by making apolgetical statements or preaching sermons, but by asking questions that will prod them "to follow the logic of their ideas through to the end" (125). Such a process is not to be taken lightly, for its goal is to lead, but not manipulate, unbelievers into seeing the truth of their situation. Such a moment is a sobering one, for, when they reach it, they can no longer claim ignorance. Now, truly, they "have seen the truth, they know the truth, and they are responsible to the truth that they now know" (128).

And when that moment comes, they must choose between two very different options: "*to fall on their knees or to turn on their heels*" (128). It is not within our power to determine which of these two options the unbeliever will choose. But we can, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, help to bring him to that impasse, that moment of crisis. Following the lead of Berger, Guinness holds up as the supreme biblical example of an apologist who pushed a willfully self-deceived

sinner to this crisis point, the prophet Nathan (1 Sam 12).

By reframing David's actions in terms of a story about a rich man who stole the sole possession of his poor neighbor to feed his lusts, Nathan engaged David's conscience, his sense of right and wrong that was deeper and more essential than his petty attempts to cover up his crimes. Once David was inside the story and his conscience had made it clear to him that the rich man deserved death, Nathan was able to spring the trap on David and reveal the depth of his sin and his need for repentance. As a result, David fell to his knees—a reaction which Guinness contrasts with the Sadducees, who, when Jesus exposed their hypocrisy, blinded themselves further and took to their heels.

There is much more to Guinness's analysis that I cannot cover in this review, but it is all undergirded by a special kind of orientation toward the task of the apologist that needs and deserves a wide hearing. The apologetics enterprise, Guinness makes clear, is not about winning, nor is it about always being right. It is about nothing more or less than defending the honor of God.

Sin, Guinness argues, is about more than disobedience. Whereas faith surrenders to God's sovereignty over our lives, sin seeks to justify itself by putting God on trial.

> *Faith desires to let God be God. Sin has framed God, whether by the ultimate insult that he, the creator of all things, does not exist, or that he, the white-hot holy One, is responsible for the evil and suffering that humans have introduced into his good creation*" (54-5).

Though Guinness does not mention it, I cannot help but be reminded of the infamous paragraph in Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* in which he accuses God of every crime, cruelty, and perversion that he can think of: a sort of anti-litany to the titles of the Messiah that are listed in Isaiah 9:6 and set to music so powerfully by Handel.

Along with Dawkins, a growing number of unbelievers have thrown

down just such a gauntlet before the Holy One of Israel, seeking to frame God for their own crimes. In response to this blasphemy, Guinness throws down his own gauntlet, "*God's name must be cleared and his existence and character brought to the fore beyond question*" (55). That, not the winning of debates, must be the ultimate goal of the apologist.

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