

# **Apologetics 101**

**Challenging Atheism**  
**Week 2**

Scott Kramer

1

## **Intro Q&A**

- How many of you have ever talked about your faith with an atheist?
- Did they hold to their atheism strongly? Were they militant towards religion or Christianity?
- Can you recall some of the reasons for their atheism?
- Did it seem like they had thoroughly thought out their worldview and were living according to it?
- Are there things that make it difficult for you to share your faith with an atheist? If so, what would make you feel more confident or comfortable doing so?

2

2

# Class Objectives

After completing this class, you will understand:

- the basic tenets of atheism
- atheism represented in its best light
- the implications of atheism
- how to challenge atheism
- how to invite an atheist to consider Christianity
- 10 types of atheists you might encounter
- prominent atheists to be aware

3

3

# Basic Tenets of Atheism

**Atheism:** the belief that *God does not exist*.

- note this is different from **agnosticism**, which is the belief that it cannot be known whether or not God exists
- atheism is founded on *naturalism*

**Naturalism:** the belief that “the universe alone exists. . . . reality is exhausted by the spatiotemporal world of physical objects accessible in some way to the senses and embraced by our best scientific theories.”<sup>1</sup>

1. J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 169.

4

4

## Basic Tenets of Atheism

### Basic Tenets of Atheism (or Naturalism)<sup>1</sup>

- The universe is self-existing (not the result of a supernatural cause/agent)
- The universe is all that exists
- The universe is solely matter, energy, space, and time
- There is no spiritual or supernatural realm
- There are no spiritual beings
- There is no immaterial soul or mind
- There is no life after death
- Knowledge is only attained through reason and empirical inquiry

1. Alex McFarland, *10 Answers for Atheists: How to Have an Intelligent Discussion About the Existence of God* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 63, Scribd eBook.

## Atheism in its Best Light

### Representing Atheism in its Best Light

**Secular Humanism** – a flavor of atheism which is *“a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.”*<sup>1</sup>

*The goal of secular humanism is “maximizing human flourishing - life, health, happiness, freedom, knowledge, love, [and] richness of experience.”*<sup>2</sup> -Steven Pinker

- That doesn’t sound bad or evil, right?

1. “Humanist Manifesto III, a Successor to the Humanist Manifesto of 1933,” American Humanist Association, last modified 2003, <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto3/>.  
2. Steve Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2019), 410.

## Atheism in its Best Light

### Human Beings Per Secular Humanism<sup>1</sup>

- solely material beings with no immaterial soul or mind
- the result of random, *unguided* biological evolution and natural selection
- progressed (because of natural selection) to higher degrees of functional order until they became self-aware with the ability to reason<sup>2</sup>
- gain knowledge by employing reason and the natural sciences, not by supernatural revelation

1. Many of these principles are derived from the "Humanist Manifesto III, a Successor to the Humanist Manifesto of 1933," American Humanist Association, last modified 2003, <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto3/>.

2. John Tooby, Leda Cosmides, and H. Clark Barrett, "The Second Law of Thermodynamics is the First Law of Psychology: Evolutionary Developmental Psychology and the Theory of Tandem, Coordinated Inheritances: Comment on Lickliter and Honeycutt (2003)," *Psychological Bulletin* 129, no. 6 (2003): 862., quoted in Steve Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2019), 413.

7

7

## Atheism in its Best Light

### Human Beings Per Secular Humanism<sup>1</sup>

- determine what is moral by sheer reason, using ethical theories such as:
  - **consequentialism**: the assessment of the consequences of various acts
  - **utilitarianism**: considering what benefits the most people or maximizes human flourishing
- are social beings who find meaning in relationships and happiness in cooperating with others to work for the betterment of society
- find their fulfillment in pursuing humane ideals and seeking the beauty in the wonders, challenges, and tragedies of life, accepting this life is all there is

1. Many of these principles are derived from the "Humanist Manifesto III, a Successor to the Humanist Manifesto of 1933," American Humanist Association, last modified 2003, <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto3/>.

8

8

## Implications of Atheism

**\*\*\*University Q&A Video Break 1 - Frank Turek\*\*\* (4:06)**

**Is an atheist aware of the logical outworkings of their worldview?**

- 1. No human value**
- 2. No meaning**
- 3. No morality**
- 4. No knowledge or free will**
- 5. No hope or justice**

*If one decides to live by atheism, they must grapple with its implications.*

9

9

## Implications of Atheism

**1. No human value** – we must start by understanding the origin of human beings upon naturalism

- humans are the result of purposeless, unintended, and unguided evolution
- they are mere matter, the accidental collection of atoms<sup>1</sup>
- there was no transcendent, spiritual mind that intentionally created them

*“on the atheistic view, **there's nothing special about human beings**. They're just accidental by-products of nature that have evolved relatively recently on an infinitesimal speck of dust called planet earth, lost somewhere in a hostile and mindless universe, and which are doomed to perish individually and collectively in a relatively short time.”<sup>2</sup> -William Lane Craig*

1. Bertrand Russel, “A Free Man’s Worship,” in *Why I am Not a Christian*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), 107, quoted in Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 86.  
2. William Lane Craig, *On Guard* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010), 35.

10

10

## Implications of Atheism

### 2. No meaning – there is no grand design or purpose to the universe

- the universe is self-existing and not the result of intelligent design
- there is no transcendent, objective purpose to human existence
- even prominent atheist Richard Dawkins acknowledges this:

*“In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.”<sup>1</sup> -Richard Dawkins*

1. Richard Dawkins, *River out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1995), 133.

## Implications of Atheism

### 3. No morality – If the universe is just random matter in motion, there is really no such thing as right or wrong, just morally neutral activity

- morality is just an illusion (“Why does it matter if my matter harms your matter?” – SK)
- there is no ultimate, objective standard transcending the physical universe that dictates how humans ‘ought’ to live
- morality is merely socially constructed and culturally **relative** (means it changes with culture)
- it has simply emerged with human evolution because it aided in human survival and flourishing

*“(morality) is something forged in the struggle for existence and reproduction, something fashioned by natural selection.”<sup>1</sup> -Michael Ruse*

1. Michael Ruse, “God is Dead. Long Live Morality,” *The Guardian*, March 15, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/mar/15/morality-evolution-philosophy>.

## Implications of Atheism

**4. No knowledge or free will** – the mind cannot transcend the physical evolutionary process to act as an independent agent or observer, it is entirely a slave to, and merely the material result of, the evolutionary process

- no matter how complex or sophisticated the mind may be, it is ultimately *“not truly free to explore or examine reality”*
- its functions are *“produced and controlled solely by the genetic, chemical makeup of, and the environmental influences on, each individual”*
- consequently, atheism and theism are just *“natural variations of human thought, and one could not be more true than the other in any objective or absolute sense.”<sup>1</sup>*

*How could anyone think, reason, attain knowledge, or act freely upon his own will?*

1. L. Russ Bush, *The Advancement: Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 39.

## Implications of Atheism

**5. No hope or justice**

*“Scientists tell us that the universe is expanding, and the galaxies are growing farther and farther apart. As it does so, it grows colder and colder as its energy is used up. Eventually all the stars will burn out, and all matter will collapse into dead stars and black holes. There will be no light; there will be no heat; there will be no life; only the corpses of dead stars and galaxies, ever expanding into the endless darkness and the cold recesses of space—a universe in ruins. This is not science fiction: This is really going to happen, unless God intervenes. Not only is the life of each individual person doomed; the entire human race and the whole edifice and accomplishment of human civilization is doomed. Like prisoners condemned to death, we await our unavoidable execution. There is no escape. There is no hope. . . . If life ends at the grave, then it makes no difference whether you live as Stalin or as Mother Teresa.”<sup>1</sup> -William Lane Craig*

1. William Lane Craig, *On Guard* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010), 31,33.

## Challenging Atheism

**Is an atheist willing to accept the implications of their worldview?**

**1. No foundation to say humans have value and are worthy of respect**

- e.g. one cannot condemn racism and discrimination as absolutely wrong

**2. No foundation for objective, or absolute moral claims**

- e.g. one cannot condemn murder and rape as absolutely wrong

**3. No foundation for knowledge and personal responsibility**

- e.g. people cannot help what they come to believe, “know”, or do. They are ultimately not responsible for their thoughts or actions.

*If one decides to live by atheism, they must understand it's a package deal and grapple with its implications. It is a complete worldview, not available for the parts that you prefer.*

15

15

## Challenging Atheism

**1. No foundation to say humans have value and are worthy of respect**

- Secular Humanism's (SH) professed commitments highly revere the well-being of humans, but these commitments imply humans have some sort of value
- per naturalism, humans are just matter in motion, the accidental byproducts of purposeless evolution. NO intrinsic value by virtue of being human.
- humans are just a part of nature with no more objective value than dirt, rocks, or dust

*The atheist cannot say humans have objective, or absolute value without committing philosophical hypocrisy and betraying naturalism. Any value that is ascribed to humans is entirely subjective.*

16

16

## Challenging Atheism

### 2. No foundation for objective, or absolute moral claims

- SH suggests humans have a responsibility to lead ethical lives that aspire to the betterment of humanity, but this implies they 'ought' to live a certain way
- per naturalism, the universe is morally *neutral*
- there was no immaterial mind or being that created the universe, ascribed value to humans, and provided a moral code humans 'ought' to live by
- whatever humans do, and whatever befalls them, is just the result of the unguided causes and effects of the universe

*The atheist cannot invoke morality to condemn any act as objectively or absolutely wrong in an **amoral** universe. To do so is to betray naturalism and commit philosophical hypocrisy.*

- *NOTE: This doesn't imply that all atheists are immoral, just that they have no real worldview foundation for living a 'moral' life within their atheistic paradigm.*

17

17

## Challenging Atheism

### 3. No foundation for knowledge and personal responsibility

- SH professes that knowledge comes from rational analysis, but this implies the existence of a human mind that is free to reason
- per naturalism, every person's mind, and therefore thoughts, opinions, and actions, are just the result of an unintended cause and effect evolutionary process
- there is no immaterial soul, or mind, that transcends this physical evolutionary process to act as an independent agent or observer to make free rational discernments

*It follows that per naturalism, one cannot help whether they think or act a certain way. They are entirely subject to, and controlled by, the evolutionary process. At bottom, there is no ultimate basis to hold people responsible for how they think or act.*

**\*\*\*University Q&A Video Break 2 - Frank Turek\*\*\* (6:39)**

18

18

## Inviting the Atheist

### Christianity offers the philosophical foundation SH lacks for its professed goals!

Christians should agree with and affirm SH's commitment to human flourishing. They should follow this up with an invitation for the SH to consider Christianity, which provides the philosophical foundation their worldview lacks.

1. Firm foundation to say humans have value and are worthy of respect
2. Firm foundation for objective, or absolute moral claims
3. Firm foundation for knowledge and personal responsibility

19

19

## Inviting the Atheist

### 1. Firm foundation to say humans have value and are worthy of respect

- humans are intentionally made in the image of God (Gen 1:27) to inhabit the earth he created (Isa 45:18)
- they are loved (Joh 3:16; Rom 8:35-39; 1 Joh 4:8-10), cared for, and honored by God (Psa 8:4-5)
- they are known by God (Jer 1:5; 17:9-10; Luk 12:7), desired by God (Hos 6:6), and created with purpose, for purpose (Col 1:16; Mat 22:37)

*“what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.” Psa 8:4-5 ESV*

20

20

## Inviting the Atheist

### 2. Firm foundation for objective, or absolute moral claims

- God is the source of perfect objective moral values and duties (Jam 4:12; Psa 19:7-8), he is perfect and just in all his ways (Deu 32:4; Psa 18:30)
- all humans (as made in the image of God) have this law written on their hearts and conscience (Rom 1:19-20; 2:14-15)
- if humans have objective value in the Christian worldview, it is logically consistent to say humans are to love one another as themselves (Mat 22:39; 1 Joh 4:11-12)

*“There is only one lawgiver and judge,” Jam 4:12 ESV*

*“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;” Psa 19:7 ESV*

*“the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;” Psa 19:8 ESV*

21

21

## Inviting the Atheist

### 3. Firm foundation for knowledge and personal responsibility

- humans are not just material beings; they are integrated beings that also possess a highly developed immaterial soul or mind<sup>1</sup> (Mat 10:28; 2 Cor 5:1-5)
- though natural laws and the physical cause and effect system of the universe influence the human body, they do not dominate the human mind<sup>2</sup>
- the mind is an independent observer of nature that can employ reason and science to gain knowledge of the universe

*“The universe was believed to be regular and orderly because it was created by a God who is a rational being. . . . People could think clearly and logically because God had given them a rational mind. Since the rationality of the human mind and the orderliness of the universe came from the same source, it was to be expected that a human mind could understand and adequately approach the proper interpretation of the natural universe.”<sup>3</sup> -L. Russ Bush*

1. Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 86-87.

2. L. Russ Bush, *The Advancement: Keeping the Faith in an Evolutionary Age* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 20.

3. *Ibid.*

22

22

## 10 Kinds of Atheists

Consider the following 10 types of atheists you might encounter:<sup>1</sup>

1. **Angry Atheist:** holds their position with anger and ire at all things supernatural. Often uses strong language to shock believers.
2. **Scientific Atheist:** believe God and science are incompatible, look to scientific explanations for everything, including the origin of life. Certain scientific theories form their theology, such as natural selection, multi-verse, alien seeding, etc...
3. **Injured Atheist:** someone whose disbelief in God arose from some kind of injury or wound they incurred. They feel that God failed them, or were even hurt by the church.
4. **Resident Contrarian Atheist:** the person who just likes to oppose every idea you have and oppose majority belief. Their default setting is one of doubt.

1. Alex McFarland, *10 Answers for Atheists: How to Have an Intelligent Discussion About the Existence of God* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 165-170, Scribd eBook.

23

## 10 Kinds of Atheists

Consider the following 10 types of atheists you might encounter:<sup>1</sup>

5. **Worldly-Wise Atheist:** their observations of the world around them, and its apparent inconsistencies and inequities, have led to their unbelief
6. **Reflective Atheist:** driven by philosophical thoughts, this person arrives at unbelief by thinking too much on faulty logic, usually with a calm resignation
7. **Antinomian Atheist:** from 2 Latin words meaning 'against the law,' this person questions everything and does not like to submit to rules, especially from a 'God'
8. **Activist Atheist:** often sees religion as only harmful, on a mission to rid the world of faith, thinking that will produce peace

1. Alex McFarland, *10 Answers for Atheists: How to Have an Intelligent Discussion About the Existence of God* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 165-170, Scribd eBook.

24

## 10 Kinds of Atheists

Consider the following 10 types of atheists you might encounter:<sup>1</sup>

9. **Bible Scholar Atheist:** one who has examined the bible aiming to expose its supposed flaws, inconsistencies, and contradictions
10. **Hasty-Generalization Atheist:** someone who jumps to non-belief conclusions based on something they've observed

1. Alex McFarland, *10 Answers for Atheists: How to Have an Intelligent Discussion About the Existence of God* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 165-170, Scribd eBook.

25

## Prominent Atheists to be Aware of

Who are the “New Atheists” and other figures I should be aware of?

- The New Atheists
  - Richard Dawkins
  - Sam Harris
  - Christopher Hitchens (passed in 2011)
  - Daniel Dennett
- Other Names
  - Stephen Hawking (passed in 2018)
  - Steven Pinker
  - Michael Ruse
  - Dan Barker

Note: For an introduction to, and summary of some of these atheists, as well as a response to some of their arguments, see chapters 2 and 3 of Alex McFarland's *10 Answers for Atheists: How to Have an Intelligent Discussion About the Existence of God*

26

26

**Thanks for Coming!!!  
See You Next Week!!!**