



A Closer Look at Atheism

BY BILL GORDON

Question:

“Hasn’t the existence of God been disproved?”

Christian Response: The person who asks this question usually believes that the existence of God has been disproved by philosophy, psychology, or science.

Philosophical Objections to the Existence of God

The Problem: The major philosophical objection to the existence of the God of the Bible involves the problem of evil. Christianity teaches that God is both all-powerful (see Ps. 115:3; Jer. 32:17; Matt. 19:26) and all-good (see Lev. 11:44-45; Pss. 11:4-6; 18:1; 145:7; Isa. 57:15; Hab. 1:13; Jas. 1:13). Christianity also maintains that God created everything (see Gen. 1:1; Ex. 20:11; Neh 9:6; Pss. 33:6; 102:25; Acts 4:24; 14:15; 17:24). Yet, evil exists in the world. Therefore, many atheists argue that either God is not all good and is the author of evil, or God is not all-powerful and cannot do anything about evil. Either way, the atheist contends that the all-good and all-powerful God of the Bible cannot exist.

Christian Response: Christians answer the philosophical arguments against the existence of God by reaffirming the Christian doctrine of creation. Unlike pantheistic religions, Christianity teaches that God has created that which is not God. The doctrine of creation teaches that the universe is not a part of God, nor is it an illusion in the mind of God. Christianity teaches that God has invested His creation with true existence. Not only did God create something separate from Himself, but also made part of His creation in His image (see Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9). According to the Bible, humanity has been made in the image of God. One of the implications of being made in God’s image is the ability to make decisions. People are not programmed robots or animals controlled by their instincts—but possess free will.

When theologians refer to human beings possessing free will they do not mean that people have unlimited options, but simply that they have the ability to choose between available options.

When God created humanity with free will He gave the ability to truly love or reject Him. God gave the ability to freely obey or disobey Him. God does not force anyone to love or follow Him (see John 3:16-18; 2 Cor. 5:19-21; Rev. 3:20; 22:17). Christianity teaches that it is the misuse of free will that allowed evil to come into the world (see Gen. 3:1-24).

When Christians explain that evil was created by a misuse of free will, atheists sometimes object by asking the following questions.

Philosophical objection: “Why did God create free creatures capable of doing evil?”

Christian Response: Christians admit that God theoretically could have created a world without morally free creatures—capable of choosing between good or evil. However, they maintain that such a world would have been inferior to the one in which we now live. It is important to remember that a system where morally free creatures do not exist is a non-moral system by definition. Christians believe that a world where ethics exist is better than one where justice and virtue are impossible. The ability to make principled decisions is one of the greatest gifts of God. The fact the gift can and has been misused does not lessen its value.

Philosophical objection: “Why didn’t God create free creatures that would not sin?”

Christian Response: Those who raise this objection never provide a satisfactory answer as to how God

could manipulate a free choice and at the same time keep the choice free. The Christian doctrine of God teaches that God is all-powerful. However, there are some things that even an all-powerful God cannot do. For example, the Bible teaches that God cannot sin (see Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Heb. 6:18; Jas. 1:13). Christian theologians also argue that God cannot do anything that is nonsensical or self-contradictory. When the skeptic asks why God didn't create a free creation that would not choose evil, he might as well ask why God didn't create square circles. Both questions are self-contradictory and nonsensical. A square is not a circle and a fixed will is not free.

Psychological Objections to the Existence of God

Psychological objection: "Hasn't psychology proved that belief in God is nothing but wish fulfillment?"

A popular argument among many atheists is that people believe in the existence of God for psychological reasons. They argue that people who believe in God are not strong enough to face reality without the psychological crutch of believing in the existence of God. Therefore, belief in God is nothing but psychological wish fulfillment.

Christian Response: When challenged by the psychological arguments against the existence of God, Christian thinkers point out that what we wish to be true has no impact upon reality. The fact that many people want the God of the Bible to exist has no implications for God's actual existence. It also does not stand to reason that just because we wish something to be true that it must, therefore, be false. It is not logical to argue that God cannot be real simply because Christians wish to Him to exist. Sometimes what we wish for really exists.

It needs to be pointed out to the unbeliever that the psychological argument against the existence of God is a two-edged sword that cuts in both directions. If the psychological arguments were valid, Christians could just as easily argue that atheism is a psychological crutch for those unable to face the reality that the God of the Bible exists. The idea that they will one day have to give an account for their life before an all-knowing and all-powerful God is psychologically distressing for the atheist. Therefore, the atheist represses the existence of God for psychological reasons because he or she wishes that God did not exist.

As has already been discussed, what we wish has no impact on reality. The psychological argument against atheism is just as logically invalid as the psychological argument against theism. However, the discussion above points out that the psychological argument is just as much of a problem for atheism as it is for Christianity.

Scientific Objections to the Existence of God

Scientific Objection: "Hasn't science proved that there is no God?"

Atheists who raise this objection often believe that both science and evolution have proved that God does not exist.

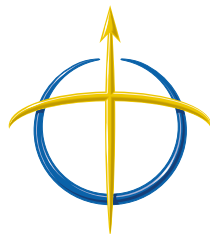
Christian Response: It is true that the theory of evolution teaches that totally natural processes can explain the universe. However, there are good reasons for rejecting atheistic evolution and for believing in the Biblical doctrine of creation.

For example, astronomical observations indicate that the universe has not always existed but came into being apparently out of nothing. These observations match the teachings of the Bible that also indicate that God created the universe out of nothing (see Ps. 33:6; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 4:11). In addition, the fossil record which many evolutionists cite as the strongest evidence for their theory is, in fact, one of its greatest weaknesses. While many extinct species can be seen in the fossil record, even evolutionists admit that there is little evidence of intermediately life forms. The fossil record has not supported the theory of evolution by providing evidence of gradual changes from one species to another. On the contrary, new species appear suddenly and fully formed in the fossil record. Far from disproving the existence of God, scientific discoveries have made belief in the existence of God more plausible.

The more science learns about the complexity and sophistication of creation the harder it is to believe that it all happened by chance. For example, science has discovered that one strand of DNA can carry the same amount of information as a volume of an encyclopedia. No one coming upon an encyclopedia volume in a forest would assume that random forces and elements had produced it by chance. Such a conclusion would be rejected as totally implausible. Yet, the atheists offer the same kind of implausible conclusion when they are confronted with the amount of information contained in one DNA molecule. Belief in the existence of God requires faith, but recent scientific discoveries have revealed that theism does not require as much faith as atheism.

Conclusions

The existence of God has not been disproved. Philosophy, psychology, and science have been unable to prove that there is no God. While it takes faith to believe in God, this faith is reasonable and logical.



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