

Saturday, October 24, 2015—West Michigan Grace Bible Conference— God Made All or No God At All: Assessing the Claims of the New Atheists

Introduction

- Psalm 14:1, 53:1
- The attack on the absolute nature of truth that Matt discussed last night has manifested itself in the rapid increase of Atheism in our day.
- Romans 1
- In 2004, Alister McGrath wrote a book titled *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*. In the years that followed a host of books hit the market by a new way of Atheists claiming that God and religious faith is worthless and cause of all the problems in modern society.
 - *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*—Sam Harris (2004)
 - *The God Delusion*—Richard Dawkins (2006)
 - *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*—Daniel Dennett (2006)
 - *Letter to a Christian Nation*—Sam Harris (2006)
 - *god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*—Christopher Hitchens (2007)
- These books are aptly titled and emblematic of what has become known as the “New Atheism.” They argue not only that religion is wrong and there is no God, but that faith is a curse upon the human race. Harris’s books were written in the context of 9/11 and are passionate about the dangers of religion. He describes the Bible as inarticulate, morally repugnant, and false. (Marshall, 8) Dawkins enlists a company of adjectives to battle the God of the Old Testament:
 - Arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction; jealous and proud of it, a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser, a misogynist, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” (Dawkins, 31)
- In his 2013 book, [*A Manual For Creating Atheists*](#) Peter Boghossian identified Harris, Dawkins, Dennett, and Hitches as the “Four Horseman” of the so-called “New Atheism.”
 - The immediate forerunners to Street Epistemologists were “the Four Horsemen,” each of whom contributed to identifying a part of the problem with faith and religion. American neuroscientist Sam Harris articulated the problems and consequences of faith. British

evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins explained the God delusion and taught us how ideas spread from person to person within a culture. American philosopher Daniel Dennett analyzed religion and its effects as natural phenomena. British-American author Christopher Hitchens divorced religion from morality and addressed the historical role of religion. The Four Horsemen called out the problem of faith and religion and started a turn in our thinking and in our culture—they demeaned society’s view of religion, faith, and superstition, while elevating attitudes about reason, rationality, Enlightenment, and humanistic values. (Boghossian, 23-24)

- David Marshall, author *The Truth Behind the New Atheism: Responding to the Emerging Challenges to God and Christianity* summarizes the arguments of the “New Atheists” as follows:
 - Faith is irrational. Faith means “believing not only without evidence, but in the teeth of the evidence, according to Dawkins. (Dawkins, *Selfish Gene*, 198)
 - Evolution undercuts any reason there may have once been to believe in God.
 - Biological and social evolution can explain the origin of religion.
 - The Bible is, at best, a jumble of aggregate of theological cullings that do little to enrich humanity and much to harm us.
 - The Jesus of history was (at best) mortal.
 - Christians in the United States (the “American Taliban,” as Dawkins calls them) constitute a profound threat to democracy.
 - All in all, the world would be better off without the gospel of Jesus Christ, or any religion. (Marshall, 9)
- The “New Atheists” harmonize in tone as well as in substance. None of them mourn the death of God in the modern world, rather they are eager to heap dirt upon his coffin or volunteer to deepen his grave. Dawkins is called an “evangelist” or “Darwinian fundamentalist” by his colleagues. Dennett compares himself and his mission to that of a “revivalist preacher.” (Dawkins, 20)
- In the table of contents for Chapter One: Street Epistemology, of his book *A Manual for Creating Atheists*, author Peter Boghossian summarizes the purpose of the book, “. . . To give people the conversational tools to talk people out of their faith and help them embrace reason.” The first lines of the chapter read:
 - “This book will teach you how to talk people out of their faith. You’ll learn how to engage the faithful in conversations that help them value reason and rationality, cast doubt on their beliefs, and mistrust their faith. I call this activist approach to helping people overcome their faith, “Street Epistemology.” The goal of this book is to create a

generation of Street Epistemologists: people equipped with an array of dialectical and clinical tools who actively go into the streets, the prisons, the bars, the churches, the schools, and the community—into any and every place the faithful reside—and help them abandon their faith and embrace reason.”

Difference Between Positive and Negative Arguments

- In the realm of ideas there is a difference between a positive and a negative argument. A negative argument sets forth all the reasons why someone else’s position is wrong. Whereas a positive argument seeks to set forth in persuasive terms why ones’ own position is correct.
- Generally, speaking it is much easier to argue in the negative than in the positive. For example, grace preachers have found it much easier to identify what prayer in the dispensation of grace is not.
- Atheists are very good at negative arguments. The literature of the “New Atheists” is full of verbose claims of how they disproved/debunked the classic Theistic arguments for the existence of God such as:
 - Cosmological Argument: The Argument From the Beginning of the Universe
 - Teleological Argument: The Argument From Design
 - Moral Argument: Morality Implies a Moral Law Giver
- While Atheists are great at trying to poke holes in Theistic arguments they are very light on advancing any positive arguments of their own. The main Atheistic argument, the Argument of Evil, has existed for a long time and continues to be one of the lone positive arguments in support of the Atheistic world view.
- More recently, since the advent of the “New Atheism” in the past 10 years or so another argument has been advanced regarding the moral character and nature of God as portrayed in the Old Testament.
- In the time we have left, I want to touch upon these two Atheistic arguments: The Problem of Evil and the God is Monster Argument. We will concluded by offering practical parting thoughts.

The Problem of Evil

- The strongest argument against believing that there is a God is rooted in what has been widely known as the Problem of Evil. Why would a perfect, and perfectly loving being create, or even allow, a world so full of pain and suffering?

- According to Norman L. Geisler, “. . . more skepticism, agnosticism, and atheism have sprung from an inability to answer various aspects of the problem of evil than from any other single issue.” (Geisler, *If God, Why Evil?*, 10)
- The main argument against believing that there is a God is surprisingly simple on the surface. The atheist’s main argument reasons as follows:
 - If there were a God, there would be no evil in the World. (From the concept of God)
 - There is evil in the world. (By observation)
 - Therefore, there is no God.
- This is a valid argument. Which means that if both its premises are true, then so is its conclusion. The weight of the argument rests upon the first premise which asserts that the existence of both God and evil is impossible.
- Knowing where the weight of the argument rests, atheist offer the following argument in support of Premise 1:
 - A morally good being prevents all the evil that he has the power and opportunity to prevent. (By definition of goodness.)
 - An omnipotent being has the power to prevent all evil. (By definition of omnipotence.)
 - An omniscient, omnipresent, and eternal being who is the creator of all has the opportunity to prevent all evil. (By definition of all the operative concepts.)
 - God is, by definition, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and is creator of all else. (By the standard, developed concept of God.)
 - Therefore, if there were a God, there would be no evil in the world. (This conclusion is identical to Premise 1 of the main argument which needed support.)
- The important premise that needs to be examined in the atheist’s supporting argument is the first one: A morally good being prevents all the evil that he has the power and opportunity to prevent.
- While this premise is close enough to the truth to sound right on first glance even in a humanistic sense it’s not true. Can a good person ever be justified in allowing, or even bring about, an instance of pain, or an instance of suffering?
- Even atheists don’t hold dentists or surgeons morally responsible for the post-operative pain that their actions inflict. Why? Because their actions are viewed as morally justified in that they are viewed as necessary for the prevention of a worse evil or the attainment of a greater good.

- So all this means that even in logical terms the atheist is forced to revise their original argument.
 - If there were a God, there would be no morally unjustified evil in the world. (From the concept of God.)
 - There is morally unjustified evil in the world. (By purported observation.)
 - Therefore, there is no God.
- In philosophy, a *theodicy* is a set of considerations that attempt to demonstrate that God can and does exist despite allowing the evil we see in the world. One such theodicy is known as the free will theodicy.
- Genesis 2:16-17—arguments based upon free will turn attention away from God and says that human beings are responsible for the pain and suffering in the world via the misuse of free will. This view maintains that God is interested in creatures that would willingly choose to serve him as opposed to being forced to do so. Consequently, only freedom can produce virtue and so God had to leave us free to do wrong as well as right.
 - Isaiah 14:12-14—did the adversary possess a will?
 - Ezekiel 28:14-17—Satan, like man was created in a state of perfection. He was perfect till iniquity was found in him. Where did the iniquity come from? From within himself.
- Genesis 3:17-19—part of the consequence of Adam’s sin was that a curse was placed on the created order.
- Romans 8:20-22—the entire creation is groaning under the bondage of corruption.
- A being prevented from ever doing wrong does not freely do good. God could have created us as robots or divine puppets, but he did not. While evil is not necessary for free will, the possibility of it is. The actuality of evil is not something that God can without robbing us of our freedom.
- Romans 3:24—God is willing to freely justify those who volitionally chose to trust in the finished word of his son.
- Regarding the importance of free will Christian apologist Norm Geisler wrote:
 - “One beauty of God’s creation is this: if you’re not willing to accept Christianity, then you’re free to reject it. This freedom to make choices—even the freedom to reject truth—is what makes us moral creatures and enables each of us to choose our ultimate destiny. This really this at the heart of why we exist at all, and why God might not be as overt in revealing himself to us as some would like. For if the Bible is true, then God has

provide each of us with the opportunity to make an eternal choice to either accept him or reject him. And in order to ensure that our choice is truly free, he puts us in an environment that is filled evidence of his existence, but without his direct presence—a presence so powerful that it could overwhelm our freedom and thus negate our ability to reject him. In other words, God has provided enough evidence in this life to convince anyone willing to believe, yet he has also left some ambiguity so as not to compel the unwilling. In this way, God gives us the opportunity to live him or reject him without violating our freedom.” (Geisler, and Turek, 31)

God is a Monster

- Deuteronomy 7:1-4, 16, 20:15-16—these are the verses that Dawkins and company use to argue that the God of the Old Testament is a capricious blood thirsty monster who ordered the genocide of the Canaanites at the hand of Israel.
- Was God unjust or ordering genocide by so instructing Israel, as Dawkins has asserted?
- Deuteronomy 9:4-5, 12:29-21; Leviticus 18—the kinds of acts the Canaanites engaged in were not trivial; incest, adultery, bestiality, ritual prostitution, homosexuality, and child sacrifice. Most of these acts are illegal, even in modern Western nations. Any group practicing these actions would not be tolerated in contemporary liberal societies, and in some jurisdictions, violators would be sentenced to death.
- Genesis 15:18-21, Joshua 2:9-11—Israel had legal title to the land of Canaan based on the promises God had made to the patriarchs. The Canaanites were essentially trespassers or squatters.
- Genesis 15:16—Israel had to wait many generations—including having to endure slavery in Egypt—before she could take possession of the land because the Canaanites were not yet sufficiently wicked to judge. So we see that God was fair and just even in how he chose to judge the Canaanites.
- Deuteronomy 7:4, 20:18—Israel faced the danger of the corrupting influences and risk of assimilation into Canaanite culture.
- Deuteronomy 4:38; 7:1, 8; 9:1—the Canaanites were more numerous than Israel, and if Israel lived side by side with them, they risked being influenced by corrupt Canaanite practices over which they had no control.
- Romans 1:18-32—as with most other things the real answer to this challenge is dispensational. The fact is that the Gentiles had already decided they didn’t want to retain God in their knowledge long before the Exodus. God had already given the gentiles over to reprobate mind before the armies of Israel were anywhere near the Promise Land.

- Acts 14:16—God suffered the Gentiles to walk in their own way.
- Given the rebellion of the Gentile world, there was nothing unjust about how God dealt with the Canaanites.

Concluding Thoughts

- While the “New Atheists” ridicule religious fundamentalism they fail to realize and/or acknowledge that they themselves are both religious and fundamental.
- Can the Atheist prove beyond doubt that God does not exist? No! Therefore he just believes it by faith in the same way a Theist believes that God does exist. Christian apologists Geisler and Turek point out in their book *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* that it takes more faith to believe that God does not exist than it does to believe that he does. Therefore, faith in God is the more rational position.
 - “. . . what we are saying is that many non-Christians do the same thing: they take a “blind leap of faith” that their non-Christian beliefs are true simply because they *want* them to be true.” (Geisler, and Turek, 31)
- Second, if Atheism is right than that means all non-Atheists is wrong. Therefore, in order for one to be right on a Atheist world view they must agree with the Atheist. How is this any less fundamental or exclusive than the Christian claim that there is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ?
- Atheists will ridicule believers in God for holding that God is eternal. Some smugly ask, “Who made God?” Aside from the fact that asking this question is like asking, “Who is the bachelor’s wife?” Does not the Atheist believe in something that is eternal, i.e., matter itself?”
- When dealing with self proclaimed Atheists we need to understand that there is a big difference between proving a proposition and accepting a proposition.
 - “We might be able to prove that Christianity is true beyond reasonable doubt, but only you can choose to accept it. Please consider this question to see if you are open to acceptance: If someone could provide reasonable answers to the most significant questions and objections you have about Christianity—reasonable to the point that Christianity seems true beyond reasonable doubt—would you become a Christian? . . . If you honest answers is no, they your resistance to Christianity is emotional or volitional, not merely intellectual. No amount of evidence will convince you because evidence is not what’s in your way—you are.” (Geisler, and Turek, 30-31)
- Michael Shermer, a self professed “Born-Again Atheist” wrote the Forward to Peter Bohgossian’s *A Manual For Creating Atheists*. Among other things Shermer stated the following:

- “when you are in the religious bubble everything makes sense and there is no such thing as chance, randomness, and contingencies. Things happen for a reason and God has a plan for each and every one of us. When something good happens, God is rewarding us for our faith, our good works, or our love of Christ. When something bad happens, well, God does work in mysterious ways you know. . . Inside the bubble the explanatory filter works at every level, from the sublime to the ridiculous, from career opportunities to parking spots. I thanked God for everything, from getting me into the Christian-based Pepperdine University (my grades and SAT scores were unspectacular) to finding a parking place at theaters and restaurants. In the Christian worldview there is a place for everything and everything is in its place, and believe it or not when you are committed to that belief system it is internally consistent and logically coherent . . . as long as you don’t look too closely and you are surrounded by others who are also in the bubble.”
- We need to understand that the word of God rightly divided and the Grace Life equip us with the capacity to answer the most difficult challenges to the faith. The Grace Message and the Grace Life possess answers to the hard questions.
- My cousin was once enrolled at Grace Bible College and in Grace School of the Bible and was studying for the ministry when he decided to embrace Atheism. A few years back at Thanksgiving I was finally able to ask him why he changed his mind. One of the things he said, among others was that when he trains Atheists, he warns them about mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalists and teaches how to respond to our arguments about God’s working in time. According to my cousin, mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalism is the only thing that comes closes to answering one’s deep questions and addressing the foolishness that takes places within the Christian bubble.

Works Cited

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