

Atheism and Christianity; Who Has the Better Case?

Zone/Edge Simulcast, October 6, 2010

I. Introduction Atheists have been with us almost as long as there have been people. Today the “new atheists” are getting a lot of attention, and causing a bit of a stir in the Zone and Edge.

- A. But first, a few simple definitions
 - i. Theist/theism
 - 1. A believer in God (or gods)
 - 2. Christianity is one branch of theism.
 - ii. Atheist/atheism
 - 1. “I don't believe in any God (or gods).”
 - 2. “There is no God” is a claim that goes beyond human ability to make, except by faith.
 - iii. Agnostic, two types
 - 1. “I don't know if there's a God.”
 - 2. “Nobody *can know* if there's a God.”
 - iv. A little dose of reality
 - 1. If there really is *no* God, then no amount of believing will conjure one up.
 - 2. If there really *is* a God, then all attempts to deny him won't make him go away.
 - 3. Both sides make a claim that can't be proven, so the conversation turns to the evidence.
- B. What reasons do atheists give for denying the existence of God?
 - i. Evolution
 - ii. Science
 - iii. Harsh God
 - iv. Evil
 - v. Competing religions
 - vi. Etc.

II. Without Excuse, Romans 1:16-20

- A. 1:16-17, Good news
 - i. The Gospel is God's power unleashed for salvation.
 - ii. It reveals God's righteousness, lived by faith.
- B. 1:18-20, Bad news
 - i. God's wrath is revealed as well—against those who *suppress* the truth.
 - ii. It's plain because God made it plain.
 - iii. His eternal power and divine nature are seen in what he made.
 - iv. We're without excuse.

III. The World As It Is

- A. Both atheists and Christians make a claim based on faith for, or against the existence of God.
- B. The argument boils down to the evidence offered; who has the better case?
- C. Is there anything in our world that would prove the point for atheists?
- D. If the world we live in doesn't fit the description of the Bible, Christians have a real problem.
- E. What do we find?
 - i. It had a beginning
 - ii. It is set within an expanding universe.
 - iii. It has fixed laws (gravity, seasons, tides, etc.).
 - iv. It is incredibly complex (sheer variety of plant and animal life, weather, interconnected life cycles).
 - v. It is full of people who hate Christians and Christianity.
 - vi. It is full of people who mock God and his word.
 - vii. It is full of people having competing religious claims.
 - viii. It is unfair (the innocent suffer while criminals get off).
 - ix. It is full of evil and injustice, and is getting worse.
 - x. It is full of sickness, death, taxes, and homework.
- F. Many of these observations, particularly the last four, are used by atheists to disprove the existence of God.
- G. Is this any different than the Bible's presentation of the world? *[These points parallel those under point C.]*
 - i. **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
 - ii. **Isaiah 42:5** This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:
 - iii. **Jeremiah 33:25-26** This is what the LORD says: "If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them." *[The point is, "As surely as I've fixed the laws of heaven and earth I'll see to it that you are restored as a people."]*
 - iv. **Genesis 2:1** Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. (See also Psalm 104:1-30.)
 - v. **Luke 21:17** All men will hate you because of me; John 15:18 If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. *In both instances Jesus is the speaker.*
 - vi. **2 Chronicles 36:16** But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy; **2 Peter 3:3-4** First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is

this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

- vii. **Matthew 24:11** . . . and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people; **Psalm 96:5** For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. (See also 2 Timothy 4:3; 2 Peter 2:1.) *From the biblical viewpoint these are all false religions. For our purposes these verses, and many like them, acknowledge the existence of counter claims.*
- viii. **Jeremiah 12:1b** Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease? (See also Psalm 73:13.)
- ix. **2 Timothy 3:1-5** But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God-- having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.
 - x. *[Do I really need a verse for this?]*
- H. The world described in the Bible perfectly corresponds to the world we find, and we cannot avoid living in it in a way that corresponds to Scripture.
- I. A good question to ask at this point is "How did it get here?"

IV. How did it get here? (Who Has the Better Response?)

- A. Options for the existence of the universe
 - i. It's always been here.
 - ii. It is a recycling universe (or parallel universes)
 - iii. Beginning with nothing, everything came.
 - iv. A personal force created it.
- B. Looking a little closer
 - i. It's always been here.
 - 1. The scientific evidence.
 - a. Hubble's Doppler effect, 1924, red-shifted galaxies (<http://www.exploratorium.edu/hubble/tools/doppler.html>)
 - b. Einstein's fudge factor, "the biggest blunder of my life" (<http://www.jb.man.ac.uk/~jpl/cosmo/blunder.html>)
 - c. Penzias and Wilson, 1965, background radiation—echo for the Big Bang (<http://www.corp.att.com/attlabs/reputation/timeline/65bang.html>)
 - 2. This is acknowledged by atheists.
 - a. "The fact that life evolved out of nearly nothing, some 10 billion years after the universe evolved out of literally nothing, is a fact so staggering that I would be mad to attempt words to do it justice" (Richard Dawkins,

- Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder*; http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/quotations/quotes/richard_dawkins.html).
- b. “Philosophically, the notion of a beginning of the present order of Nature is repugnant to me ... I should like to find a genuine loophole” (Arthur Eddington, “The End of the World: From the Standpoint of Mathematical Physics,” *Nature*, vol. 127 [1931], p. 450; <http://www.veritas-ucsb.org/library/origins/quotes/universe.html>).
- ii. It is a recycling universe (or parallel universes)
 1. This is unverifiable speculation.
 2. The hard evidence only accounts for once.
 - iii. Beginning with nothing, everything came.
 1. A logical contradiction; you cannot have an uncaused cause.
 2. The real problem for the atheist is that there is “something” rather “nothing.”
 - a. “[Atheism] is not only incapable of explaining the origin of the universe, but it shouldn't be expected to perform such a function in the first place” (Sean, *Discover*; <http://atheism.about.com/od/atheismscienceevolution/a/ExplainUniverse.htm>).
 - b. To argue that atheism shouldn't be expected to answer the question is merely a frank admission that it can't.
 - iv. A personal force created it (argument from design).
 1. “Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose” (Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, p. 1; http://www.arn.org/idfaq/How%20does%20intelligent%20design%20apply%20to%20biology.htm#_edn).
 2. “In order to make a universe as big and wonderful as it is, lasting as long as it is—we're talking fifteen billion years and we're talking huge distances here—in order for it to be that big, you have to make it perfectly. Otherwise, imperfections would mount up and the universe would either collapse on itself or fly apart, and so it's actually quite a precise job. And I don't know if you've had discussions with people about how critical it is that the density of the universe come out so close to the density that decides whether it's going to keep expanding forever or collapse back, but we know it's within one percent” (George Smoot in an interview with Fred Heeren, *Show Me God: What the Message from Space Is Telling Us About God*, p. 168; <http://www.veritas-ucsb.org/library/origins/quotes/universe.html>).
 3. “Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but evolved” (Francis Crick, *What Mad Pursuit*, p.

138; <http://www.truefreethinker.com/articles/which-i-agree-richard-dawkins-intelligent-design>).

4. "The laws of science, as we know them at present, contain many fundamental numbers, like the size of the electric charge of the electron and the ratio of the masses of the proton and the electron The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been finely adjusted to make possible the development of life" (Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, p. 125; <http://www.veritas-ucsb.org/library/origins/quotes/universe.html>).
 5. It was the argument from design that led Anthony Flew from atheism to theism (<http://www.biola.edu/antonyflew/>).
- C. A Telling Conclusion: "For the scientist who has lived by faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries" (Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, <http://www.veritas-ucsb.org/library/origins/quotes/universe.html>).

V. A Word about Technique, Intentionally putting Christianity in the worst possible light.

- A. Confusing the covenants: "We read the Golden Rule and judge it to be a brilliant distillation of many of our ethical impulses. And then we come across another of God's teachings on morality: if a man discovers on his wedding night that his bride is not a virgin, he must stone her to death on her father's doorstep. (Deuteronomy 22:13-21)" (Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, <http://www.randomhouse.com/kvpa/harris/ltn quotes.php>).
- B. Confusing the heart of Christianity with the stupidity of so many of its adherents
 - i. "Christians have abused, oppressed, enslaved, insulted, tormented, tortured, and killed people in the name of God for centuries, on the basis of a theologically defensible reading of the Bible" (Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, p.23; <http://thriceholly.net/harris.htm>).
 - ii. Church history is littered with examples, all expressly disobeying the clear teaching of Jesus.
- C. The run-on rant: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser, a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully" (Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 51; <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/news/2006/20061024atkinson.cfm?doc=147>).
- i. This kind of comment is meant to put the Christian on the defensive with an overwhelming amount of rapid-fire attacks.

- ii. The basic line of reasoning seems to be this: My understanding of the OT God is the only valid interpretation; this God is nasty, so only a fool would believe in him. "I don't like this God" does not logically lead to "There is no God."
- iii. This is not a reasoned argument; it's not proof of anything; it's not evidence. It is simply Dawkins' personal conviction.
 - 1. Words like "unpleasant," "petty," "bully," etc., are all emotional terms.
 - 2. Christians and Jews from different countries over thousands of years have expressed the opposite conviction.
- iv. It also ignores the other side of the coin; let's look at some examples:
 - 1. "Unjust"
 - a. **Psalm 11:7** For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face.
 - b. **Isaiah 51:4-5** Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: The law will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations. My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm.
 - 2. "Unforgiving"
 - a. **Numbers 14:19** In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.
 - b. **Jeremiah 33:8** I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me.
 - c. **Isaiah 1:18** Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.
- v. Either, he is unaware of these (and hundreds of similar passages), in which case he doesn't know what he's talking about.
- vi. Or, he is aware, but doesn't mention any of it, in which case he's being dishonest.
- vii. None of this discounts the difficulties encountered in the OT; it is the story of a holy God dealing with people insisting on rebelling against him.
- viii. By the way, he calls it all "fiction," so what is he so upset about?

VI. Answering the Skeptic

A. Forewarned is forearmed

i. Websites

1. <http://www.4truth.net/>
2. <http://www.powertochange.ie/questions/qna7.html>

3. <http://library.thinkquest.org/C0126626/fate/fate%20of%20universe.anthropic%20principle.main.htm>
 4. <http://www.2001principle.net/2005.htm>
 5. <http://www.apologetics.org/>
- ii. Books
1. *Answers to Tough Questions Skeptics Ask About the Christian Faith*, Josh McDowell
 2. *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences*, Norman Geisler and Kim Brooks
 3. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, Norman Geisler and Frank Turek
 4. *The Science of God: The Convergence of Scientific and Biblical Wisdom*, Gerald L. Schroeder
 5. *Without a Doubt: Answering the 20 Toughest Faith Questions*, Kenneth Samples
 6. *Building Belief*, Chad Meister
 7. *The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel
 8. *Busted: Exposing Popular Myths about Christianity*, Fred von Kamecke
- iii. Chapel pastors and ministry leaders
- B. *How* you speak is more important than *what* you say
- i. **2 Timothy 2:23-26** Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.
 - ii. **1 Peter 3:15-16** But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.
- C. Discerning the black hole
- i. Don't waste your time arguing.
 1. If someone is genuinely struggling with difficult problems, spend as much time as it takes.
 2. If someone just wants to attack, don't waste your time. Pray for them as you walk away.
 - ii. Jesus himself didn't waste time arguing and told his disciples not to as well.

1. **Mark 6:11** And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.
2. **Matthew 7:6** Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.
3. Speaking of which . . .

VII. The Atheist Has to Account for the Galilean

- A. All of the attacks the atheists can muster can't make Jesus disappear.
 - i. Ancient historians affirm—
 1. He was born and lived in Israel.
 2. He was baptized by John.
 3. He gathered disciples
 4. He was said to perform miracles
 5. He was crucified by Pilate and the Jewish leaders
 6. He was said to have risen from the dead
 7. He was worshipped as God by his followers
 - ii. Then there's the New Testament
 1. Written by eyewitnesses
 2. All but one died as a martyr
- B. Jesus has had more of a positive impact on our planet than anyone else in all history with no close second.
 - i. His entire purpose was to reunite us with God the Father.
 - ii. We would be wise to follow his example.