

Biblical Theological Seminary
ST777 Seminar: Attacks on Christianity
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IF GOD EXISTS, WHY ARE THERE SO MANY ATHEISTS?*

*a slightly edited form of a presentation given at Cornell University 29 Sept 1979

Introduction

A fair question, deserving a fair answer

Speaker believes biblical Christianity to be true

Thus, we are not going to answer this for god of Islam or of liberal versions of Christianity, but for God as presented in Bible.

The Argument Appraised

The Structure of the Argument:

Easily tested by considering an alternative Q:

"If God doesn't exist, why so many theists?"

[this can be used as quick comeback for heckler, etc.]

This alternative usually answered by claim that theists are engaged in wishful thinking; atheists, on other hand, are not afraid to look at facts, accept reality in all its harshness.

Not so simple if God we are considering is God of Bible

More likely atheists are wishful thinkers:

Easy to see how they would not wish to have a God who:

--will judge actions and thoughts

--restricts their behavior, condemns their sins

Not so easy to see why theists would invent God who:

--needs nothing from them, so cannot earn his favor

--sees even most righteous person as wicked, deserving punishment

--holds those who know him better as obligated to a higher degree and judged by stricter standard

--will forgive the most dissolute person who truly repents, but condemn the most righteous who is depending on his own righteousness

[see R.C. Sproul, *Psychology of Atheism*; C.S. Lewis, *Pilgrim's Regress*]

In fact, in the US there are not so many atheists:

acc to Gallup poll taken in 1982:

44% are creationists

38% are theistic evolutionists

9% are uncertain

9% believe evolution was not guided by God

[source: cited in Wm Provine, *The Scientist* (5 Sept 88)]

Let us return to main argument, however, asking if Bible would give any reason to believe atheists, few or many, might exist:

Reasons for Atheism according to the Bible

1. The "Silence" of God

Meaning: God is relatively hidden, as he does not continually intervene in the universe in an obvious way.

Result: God allows his existence & presence to be ignored or his nature to be misinterpreted (see, e.g., Ps 50, esp verse 21).

Ps 50:21 (NIV) *These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether {[21] Or thought the 'I AM' was} like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face.*

Thus "*there is a way that seems right, but end is death*" (Prov 14:12; 16:25), so that a person may be *relatively* sincere but drastically wrong (a similar thing is true in other everyday matters, e.g., accidentally taking poison)

Why would God let this happen?

Reasons:

--to demonstrate true character of sin (Rom 1:21-32)

Romans 1:21-32 (NIV) *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen. 26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. 28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Although they know*

God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

--to give room for genuine moral behavior (Eccl 8:11; Deut 13:1-3)

Eccl 8:11 (NIV) *When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.*

Deut 13:1-3 (NIV) *If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, 2 and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," 3 you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.*

--to lead men to repentance (Rom 2:4)

Romans 2:4 (NIV) *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*

Thus, according to Bible, God has good reasons for not making his existence as obvious as he might.

2. The Sinfulness of Mankind

Humans often suppress the truth to justify unrighteousness (Rom 1:18):

Romans 1:18 (NIV) *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness..*

Examples:

--Fred Hoyle in *Nuclei, Galaxies & Quasars* (1965)

shortcut: don't waste time investigating cosmos with special initial conditions

--Barrow and Tipler in *Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (1986)

seek to avoid designer by saying if conditions not just right, we wouldn't exist

--Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (1937)

idea of meaningless universe lets us do what we want

--Robert Jastrow, *God and Astronomers* (1978)

gives examples of Einstein, et al seeking to avoid beginning

Humans are easily deceived by others (2 Tim 3:13)

2Tim 3:12-13 (NIV) *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

Problem of specialization: few know what data looks like outside their field

Thus, according to Bible, humans have reasons for making evidence for God less obvious than it really is.

Conclusion: If the God of the Bible exists and mankind is as described in Bible, then we should expect many atheists.

Transition: So far, have not considered question whether or not God exists, but only the force of the question, "If God exists, why are there so many atheists?" This question actually has no force against biblical Christianity, as such a situation is predicted by it. But, it is important that we not stop here. Is there any evidence for the existence of the God of the Bible? Yes, have more evidence for existence of God of Bible than for any other god or for the non-existence of god.

Evidence for the Existence of the God of the Bible

Design in Animate Nature

Organization of simplest life and problem of random processes producing such order

Design in complex organisms and problem of mutation + natural selection producing such
[good discussion in Michael Denton, *Evolution, a Theory in Crisis* (1986) and Alan
Hayward, *Evolution: the Facts & the Fallacies* (1985)]

Inanimate Design also impressive, cannot be explained by natural selection

[see P.C.W. Davies, *Accidental Universe* (1982); Newman, "Designed Universe"]

Cosmology

Universe appears to have had a beginning in finite past

[see Ross, *Fingerprint of God* (1989)]

Origin of earth: details of best scientific model fit Genesis one

[Newman/Eckelmann, *Genesis One & the Origin of the Earth* (1977, 2007)]

Fulfillment of Prophecy

[see Newman, *Evidence of Prophecy* (1988) ; Stoner/Newman, *Science Speaks* (1976); John
Urquhart, *Wonders of Prophecy*]

Conclusions

Moral force of evidence

Not beyond quibbling

remember silence of God & sinfulness of humans

Sufficient

we will have no valid excuse at judgment

Pascal's Wager

Infinite loss if one bets against Christianity and is wrong

At least spend your time in this life investigating religions with no second chance!

The Gospel

All are sinners.

God must punish, because he is just and righteous.

He has provided a substitute, because he is merciful.

You need to avail yourself of God's substitute, Jesus the Messiah.