

Apologetics 2: Response to New Atheism (CM5)

Faith and Reason

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Apologetics 2 (CM5)

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Our Biblical Mandate

But in your hearts revere 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, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 1 Peter 3:15-17

“The defense of the faith is not a luxury or intellectual vanity. It is a task appointed by God that you should be able to give a reason for the hope that is in you as you bear witness before the world.” R. C Sproul

Faith versus Reason

A fiction does not die, an illusion never passes away, a fairy tale does not refute itself... You cannot kill a breeze, a wind, a fragrance; you cannot kill a dream or an ambition. God, manufactured by mortals in their own quintessential image, exists only to make daily life bearable despite the path that every one of us treads towards extinction... We cannot assassinate or kill an illusion. In fact illusion is more likely to kill us — **for God puts to death everything that stands up to him, beginning with reason, intelligence and the critical mind.** All the rest follows in a chain reaction.

Michel Onfray, *In Defence of Atheism*, 2007

What is Faith?

- ▶ **“Faith” – derives from Latin fides (from which we get “fidelity”), meaning “trust”, “reliance.”**
- ▶ **Also... 1. belief, trust, confidence; 2. that which produces belief, evidence, token, pledge, engagement; 3. trust in its objective aspect, troth, observance of trust, fidelity.**
- ▶ *“Atheists do not have faith... Scientific belief is based upon publicly checkable evidence. Religious faith not only lacks evidence; its independence from evidence is its joy, shouted from the rooftops.”* Richard Dawkins
- ▶ *“A case can be made that faith is one of the world’s great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate. Faith, being belief that isn’t based on evidence, is the principal vice of any religion.”* Richard Dawkins

What is Faith?

- Michel Onfray accuses religious believers of *“unbelievable credulity because they do not want to see the evidence.”*
- *“The atheist position is based on evidence and arguments to best explanation. The atheist believes in what she has good reason to believe in and doesn’t believe in supernatural entities that there are few reasons to believe in, none of them strong. If this is a faith position then the amount of faith required is very small. Contrast this with believers in the supernatural and we can see what a true faith position is. Belief in the supernatural is belief in what there is a lack of strong evidence to believe in.*

“The status of atheist and religious belief are thus quite different. Only religious belief requires faith because only religious belief postulates the existence of entities which we have no good evidence to believe exist.” Julian Baggini

What is Faith?

- **Faith** (Merriam-Webster Online): a: allegiance to duty or a person: loyalty; b (1): fidelity to one's promises (2): sincerity of intentions. 2. a (1): belief and trust in and loyalty to God (2): belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion; b (1): firm belief in something for which there is no proof; (2): complete trust.
- *“Faith is believing what you know ain’t true.”* Mark Twain
- “Simply put, faith means belief or trust. Faith is a particular kind of belief. It is strong, it is often unwavering and it does not require proof or evidence. Most would agree that belief is faith when it is quite strong and does not involve evidence or practical reasoning.”
www.atheistempire.com
- “When such grounds for belief are available we have no need for faith. It is not faith that justifies my belief that drinking fresh, clean water is good for me, but evidence. It is not faith that tells me it is not a good idea to jump out of the windows of tall buildings, but experience.”
Julian Baggini

What is Faith?

- *“If one must have faith to believe in something, then the likelihood of that something having truth or value is considerably diminished.”* Christopher Hitchens
- *“Our belief is not a belief. Our principles are not a faith.”* Christopher Hitchens
- German philosopher Immanuel Kant helped create this problem of defining faith:
“I have... found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith.” Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*
- Many have taken Kant to mean that if there were convincing evidence for the existence of God, then there would be no room left for faith.

Is Faith in God Blind or Evidence-Based?

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus^y), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

John 20:24-29

Is Faith in God Blind or Evidence-Based?

Dawkins considers that all faith is blind faith, and that Christian and Muslim children are brought up to believe unquestioningly. Not even the dim-witted clerics who knocked me about at grammar school thought that. For mainstream Christianity, reason, argument and honest doubt have always played an integral role in belief.

Terry Eagleton

Is Faith a Delusion?

“Faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument.” Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense.

“You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”

²⁵ “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable.

Acts 26:24-25

Delude: (from Latin *de-ludere* — to play false, mock, deceive) originally “to deceive the mind or judgement to cause that which is false to be accepted as true;” now almost invariably suggests psychiatric illness – “a fixed false belief” or “persistent false belief against strong contradictory evidence, especially as a symptom of psychiatric disorder.”

Is Faith a Delusion?

As a child I believed (for a very short while) in Santa Claus. However I soon sussed the real situation out, although I must confess I kept my doubts about Santa's existence to myself for some time because I also noticed that there was material advantage in so doing. I have never heard of an adult coming to believe in Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy. I have known many adult people come to believe in God. So clearly there is a great difference. But it is still worth asking the question: why is faith in the Tooth Fairy a delusion? The answer is obvious — the Tooth Fairy does not exist.

Alister McGrath, Dawkins' God

Faith MIGHT be a delusion... IF God does not exist

Faith in God certainly *is* a delusion, *if* God does not exist. **But what if God does exist?** Then *atheism* is the delusion. So the real question to ask is: ***does God exist?***

Many atheists (inspired by Sigmund Freud) claim people believe in God because of an incapacity to cope with the real world and its uncertainties.

“Religion is imagined because people do not wish to face reality. Better the faith that brings peace of mind than the rationality that brings worry – even at the price of a perpetually mental infantilism.” Michel Onfray

“A true opium of the people is a belief in nothingness after death — the huge solace of thinking that for our betrayals, greed, cowardice, murders, we are not going to be judged.”

Czeslaw Milosz, Nobel Laureate

Faith and Science

- ▶ Richard Dawkins insists often that *“atheists have no faith,”* yet no scientist could engage in science without believing in (having faith in) the rational intelligibility of the universe, and then believing in the evidence presented to him.
- ▶ *“Science can proceed only if the scientist adopts an essentially theological worldview. Even the most atheistic scientist accepts as an act of faith the existence of a law-like order in nature that is at least in part comprehensible to us.”*

Paul Davis, Physicist (*nontheist*)

Faith and Science


Science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration towards truth and understanding. This source of feeling, however, springs from religion. To this there also belongs the faith in the possibility that the regulations valid for the world of existence are rational, that is, comprehensible to reason. I cannot imagine a scientist without that profound faith. The situation may be expressed by an image: science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.

Albert Einstein

Faith and Science

I'm not an atheist and I don't think I can call myself a pantheist. Albert Einstein


Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe — a spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble. In this way the pursuit of science leads to a religious feeling of a special sort, which is indeed quite different from the religiosity of someone more naïve. Albert Einstein



Faith and Science


Physics is powerless to explain its faith [note his explicit use of the word] in the mathematical intelligibility of the universe, for the simple reason that you cannot begin to do physics without believing in that intelligibility.

Professor Sir John Polkinghorne



The Meaning of Proof

Only in mathematics is “proof” considered conclusive – all other endeavors (even the “hard” sciences) demand only the equivalent of the legal system’s “proof beyond a reasonable doubt” – proof sufficient to convince a reasonable person that a certain claim is true.



Atheistic Implications

Modern humanism is the faith that through science humankind can know the truth and so be free. But if Darwin's theory of natural selection is true this is impossible. The human mind serves evolutionary success, not truth.

Atheist John Gray

If Dawkins is right that we are the product of mindless unguided natural processes, then he has given us strong reason to doubt the reliability of human cognitive faculties and therefore inevitably to doubt the validity of any belief that they produce — including Dawkins' own science and his atheism. His biology and his belief in naturalism would therefore appear to be at war with each other in a conflict that has nothing at all to do with God.

Philosopher Alvin Plantinga

1. *Believers are mostly naive or stupid. Or, at least, they're not as clever as atheists.*

Response: This is so clearly untrue it's barely worth bothering with. Richard Dawkins, in his bestselling *The God Delusion*, was reduced to producing a "study" by Mensa that purported to show an inverse relationship between intelligence and belief. He also claimed that only a very few members of the Royal Society believe in a personal god. So what? Some believers are undoubtedly stupid, but I've met one or two atheists I wouldn't trust to change a light-bulb.

2. *The few clever ones are pathetic because they need a crutch to get them through life.*

Response: Don't we all? Some use booze rather than the Bible. It doesn't prove anything about either.

3. *They are also pathetic because they can't accept the finality of death.*

Response: Maybe, but it doesn't mean they're wrong. Count the number of atheists in the foxholes or the cancer wards.

4. *They have been brainwashed into believing. There is no such thing as a “Christian child”, for instance — just a child whose parents have had her baptised.*

Response: True, and many children reject it when they get older. But many others stay with it.

5. *They have been bullied into believing.*

Response: This is also true in many cases but you can't actually bully someone into believing — just into pretending to believe.

6. *If we don't wipe out religious belief by next Thursday week, civilisation as we know it is doomed.*

Response: Of course the mad mullahs are dangerous and extreme Islamism is a threat to be taken seriously. But we've survived monotheist religion for 4,000 years or so, and I can think of one or two other things that are a greater threat to civilisation.

7. *Trust me: I'm an atheist.*

Response: Why?

(Humphrys adds wryly: *“I make no apology if I have oversimplified their views with that little list: it's what they do to believers all the time.”*)

