

ATHEISM: GOD'S UGLY TWIN SISTER

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Names can be deceiving. Popular opinion throughout the world is that atheism is different from religion; after all, it is called “a-theism.” However, a closer look into atheism reveals that this is simply untrue. The goal of this essay will be to show the similarities between atheism and religion, specifically Christianity, revealing that atheism is actually a religion in itself and in many ways juxtaposed to the true faith in Christ. Atheism attempts to fill all of the voids left by “unbelief” with a theology that is not called theology. Atheism is God’s ugly twin sister because atheists believe in a god, have an authoritative body of teaching that becomes the basis of their faith, believe in a crucial savior for mankind, and have doctrinal teachings being preached in centers for the furthering of knowledge and worship of their god.

While it is common to think that “a-theism” (literally “without god(s)”) is a belief in the absence of God(s), this thought is actually quite mistaken. After speaking with an atheist or reading atheist literature it actually becomes quite clear that atheism does indeed have a god. That god is called “nature.” Nature, which includes everything a person can evaluate with their five senses—from the rock underneath one’s foot to the rocks flying around in outer space, from the gases entering one’s lungs to the lung-destroying gases of galaxies far away, from the liquids flowing deep within the earth to the liquids assumed to have flowed on distant (and not-so-distant) planets—becomes the basis for everything an atheist believes. “The Cosmos [the universe] is all that is or ever was or ever will be.”¹ Nature is the only foundation of all that is made—seen and not-yet-seen.

Famed Atheist Carl Sagan certainly does not deny the role that nature plays as God for an atheist. Describing his view with the help of Albert Einstein and Baruch Spinoza, he states:

“By God they meant something not very different from the sum total of the physical laws of the universe; that is, gravitation plus quantum mechanics plus grand unified field theories plus a few other things equaled to God. And by that all they meant was that here were a set of exquisitely powerful physical principles that seemed to explain a great deal that was otherwise inexplicable about the universe... That the same laws of physics apply everywhere is quite remarkable. Certainly that represents a power greater than any of us.”²

¹ Thompson, David C.. "Modernism." *What in the world is going on?: Identifying Hollow and Deceptive Worldviews, A Guide for Christian Parents, Churches, and Schools*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 2010. p.33. Print.

² Hitchens, Christopher. *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever*. Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo, 2007. p.227. Print.

This glorified view of the power inherent in nature, as something that can be seen and studied and mathematically understood, represents the highest thing that could possibly be exalted by mankind and yet still be investigated and characterized within the physical world.

A Christian's view of the origin of the true God (the Holy Trinity) is paralleled by the origin of nature as explained by atheism: the origin is simply unknown. We do not know, and cannot comprehend the origin of God because God is eternal. He has no beginning and no end—He is outside the realm of time. The beginning of nature has been theorized as a “Big Bang,” a springing forth and expansion of all matter and space from a “singularity,” or an infinitesimally small “zone of infinite density.”³ But how did this zone of density originate? “What existed prior to this event is completely unknown and is a matter of pure speculation.”⁴ Proponents of the Big Bang Theory are unsure about the makeup of this zone of density, let alone its origin. So while the origin of God (humanly speaking) has not been revealed to Christians and yet it is believed by them, also the origin of the universe has not been discovered by atheists and yet it is believed to have a natural explanation.

Not only are the origins of God and nature unknown to Christians and atheists, respectively, even the respective Gods of Christians and atheists are not fully understood themselves. God, in essence, is his good and holy will, which is beyond understanding for Christians: “His understanding no one can fathom” (Is 40:28). While atheists believe that nature can be understood more and more as time goes by, they still hold that there is much to be discovered. As Einstein professed, “What I see in Nature is a magnificent structure that we can comprehend only very imperfectly, and that must fill a thinking person with a feeling of humility.”⁵

This humble awe and adoration given to nature is also very much similar to the awe and adoration given to God by Christians. “A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence

³ "Big Bang Theory." *Big Bang Theory*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Oct. 2012.
<<http://www.big-bang-theory.com/>>.

⁴ "The Big Bang." *University of Michigan*. N.p., n.d. Web. 31 Oct. 2012.
<<http://www.umich.edu/~gs265/bigbang.htm>>.

⁵ Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2006. p.15. Print.

and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths.”⁶ Atheists do not only stand in awe of nature, they believe no other religion could exhibit the kind of reverence that should be given to nature. The atheist reveres nature as a Christian reveres God.

This awe is especially evident when an atheist discusses natural selection. “Natural selection is a powerful, elegant, and economic explicator of life on earth in all its diversity.”⁷ Nature’s creative power and creative design are praised through natural selection, its number one prophet. And this prophet testifies “that [man] is an earth-child whose drama has meaning only upon earth’s bosom.”⁸ According to atheism, the earth, that is, nature and its laws, has powerfully breathed life into man and even given him his purpose.

If atheism is shown to be a religion with a god who is not necessarily called a “god”, can it really be referred to as “a-theism”? Some have argued that atheism has been around much longer than most people seem to realize. “Possibly the most common form of Atheistic denial is represented by the pantheistic identification of God with the world.”⁹ Pantheism teaches that God is encompassed by all things, or that God unfolds himself in the world. If pantheists don’t believe in a personal God, but believe that he is essentially found everywhere in nature, then “Pantheism is but painted Atheism.”¹⁰ Even Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary acknowledges this in its number one definition of pantheism: “1. a doctrine that equates God with the forces and laws of the universe.”¹¹

However, one should not think that this observation goes unnoticed by the ever-observing atheist community. As another famed atheist, Richard Dawkins, states, “Pantheists don’t believe in a supernatural God at all, but use the word God as a non-supernatural synonym for Nature, or for the Universe, or for the lawfulness that governs its workings...Pantheism is sexed-up atheism.”¹² Atheists certainly are aware of the similarities between their teachings and

⁶ Dawkins, p.12.

⁷ Hitchens, p.360

⁸ Graebner, Theodore. *God and the Cosmos; a critical analysis of atheism.*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1932. p.10. Print.

⁹ Graebner, p.12.

¹⁰ Graebner, p.15

¹¹ "Pantheism - Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary." *Dictionary and Thesaurus - Merriam-Webster Online*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Nov. 2012.
<<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pantheism>>.

¹² Dawkins, p.18.

pantheism. “Every intelligible Theism involves a dualism or a pluralism, while every non-theism is as inevitably driven, sooner or later, to a monism.”¹³ Denying that God exists unavoidably leads one to replace him somehow, somehow with another god, no matter how the name or classification is explained.

Others have chosen a different name altogether for the religion of atheism. David C. Thompson refers to it simply as “Naturalism.” “Naturalism’s main and enduring contribution is in the area of Prime Reality (that which has always existed and explains everything else). According to Naturalism, the universe (or nature or matter) is the Prime Reality.”¹⁴ Though he doesn’t reference atheism as “atheism”, this is undoubtedly what Thompson is in essence describing. The religion of atheism is defined by the god it adores, nature.

Thus this obvious conclusion can be reached: Atheism is by no means a non-religion. It is instead the rejection of the supernatural. For an atheist, to look for God is to look for him only in what one can discern from nature. As the astronomer Lalande once exclaimed, he “had swept the entire heavens with his telescope and found no God there.”¹⁵ Nature, the cosmos, the universe, or whatever else atheism chooses to call its god, it is the one true existence that can be trusted.

If powerful nature is all that exists, then it must follow that the only way to truly understand nature and its purpose is to use the only thing that can possibly evaluate nature: evidence as it is interpreted by the five senses. As Christians lean on the solid foundation of truth found only in Scripture, atheists lean on the only solid existence their beliefs will allow—the physical world. As David C. Thompson indicates, for those who look only to nature, “reason and the senses, the rational mind and observation, are instruments for gaining truth, knowledge, and facts.”¹⁶ The atheist’s version of the Holy Scriptures has become the inalterable laws of nature. As Carl Sagan explained, “...if by ‘God’ one means the set of physical laws that govern the universe, then clearly there is such a God.”¹⁷ And the only way to read and comprehend the

¹³ Hitchens, p.170.

¹⁴ Thompson, p.33.

¹⁵ Graebner, p.14-15.

¹⁶ Thompson, p.34.

¹⁷ Dawkins, p.19.

“language” and message of Sagan’s god, nature, is through the faculties of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch.

The resulting interpretation and categorization that follows an investigation of the laws of physics also seemingly strengthens mankind’s trust in the physical world around him, and *only* in the physical world around him. In a sense, man’s interpretation of and resulting knowledge in nature is akin to the faith of a believer. If faith according to God is “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb 11:1), then this sentiment is religiously echoed by Richard Dawkins in his own view of the understanding of nature, “If there is something that appears to lie beyond the natural world as it is now imperfectly understood, we hope eventually to understand it and embrace it within the natural.”¹⁸ An atheist believing that nature is the only true existence, and the only thing able to give and support this belief, looks strikingly similar to a Christian believing that God is the only true God and the only one able to provide such faith.

Even the faith of the atheist exhibits something that opponents to religion commonly criticize the religious for: blind adherence (from the perspective of the opposing view). Atheists believe that since, according to the five senses, we cannot prove the existence of our faith it must be characterized as blind adherence to our religious ideals and agendas. Ironically (or not), people of any religion could claim the same for an atheist. “The other thing I cannot help remarking upon is the overweening confidence with which the religious assert minute details for which they neither have, nor could have, any evidence.”¹⁹ Denying even the possibility of true faith in a God shows a blind adherence of faith to the *physical evidence* given by the laws of nature without accepting even the possibility of a supernatural existence in this world.

The value of faith to a believer is also echoed by atheists in their value of knowledge and the human mind. Dawkins states, “What expertise can theologians bring to deep cosmological questions that scientists cannot?”²⁰ The faith poured into tested physical laws commonly turns beliefs ordinarily viewed as theories into irrefutable convictions in the heart of the atheist. Nowhere is this more evident than in the atheist’s confidence in the Theory of Evolution by natural selection: “Evolution by natural selection is indeed ‘only a theory’: the most successful

¹⁸ Dawkins, p.14.

¹⁹ Dawkins, p.34.

²⁰ Dawkins, p.56.

and the most testable theory in human history.”²¹ If something can be testified by God in His Word, then a true Christian accepts that Word as truth. In a similar manner, if something can be tested in nature and widely accepted by scientists as virtual fact, then it can be elevated as truth without question.

This elevation of the human interpretation of nature to a level of irrefutable, doctrinal truth is also the basis for an atheist condemning all other beliefs. True Christianity, as God Himself testifies, is what He has revealed to man through Christ (Eph 1:9). Anything in opposition to what God has revealed must be rejected (1 Tim 1:8-11). In the same way, an atheist must reject anything opposed to what scientific evaluation has revealed about nature.

“We can at once set aside all mythological stories, all miracles and so-called revelations, for which it is claimed that they have come to us in some sort of supernatural way. All such mystical teachings are irrational, inasmuch as they are confirmed by no actual experience, but, on the contrary, are irreconcilable with the known facts which have been confirmed to us by a rational investigation of nature.”²²

The use of reason in light of physical evidence is the say all and end all for atheistic beliefs, and anything contradicting those beliefs is flatly rejected.

If one must use the senses in light of reason to understand and explain the world, then it naturally leads one to believe that mankind itself is the only hope for achieving a true knowledge of the cosmos. In essence, mankind itself becomes the savior of mankind. The “intellectual elite” act as prophets to the less intelligent, and collectively, through the furthering of knowledge from one generation to the next, represent man’s savior from uneducated opinions exemplified by supernatural religions. “Darwinism is the story of humanity’s liberation from the delusion that its destiny is controlled by a power higher than itself.”²³

If the Christian view of liberation is the freedom from sin, death, and the devil through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, then what sort of liberation is needed that atheism declares to offer? It offers liberation from religious ideals. “Religion is undoubtedly a divisive force,” Dawkins states.²⁴ After enumerating many conflicts brought about by religious tensions, he

²¹ Hitchens, p.287.

²² Graebner, p.14.

²³ Dawkins, p.5.

²⁴ Dawkins, p.259.

explains in more detail, “Even if religion did no other harm in itself, its wanton and carefully nurtured divisiveness—its deliberate and cultivated pandering to humanity’s natural tendency to favour in-groups and shun out-groups—would be enough to make it a significant force for evil in the world.”²⁵ Atheism looks to save mankind by overcoming the hateful tyranny of religious thought in the same way that Christianity looks to the Savior who overcame the tyranny of irreligious thought.

In fact, liberation from religious tyranny seems to be the driving force for many outspoken atheists. One could argue that is why Dawkins wrote his famous book, *The God Delusion*, a book seen by many atheists as the preeminent atheist writing. Dawkins himself says in the opening pages, “I believe there are plenty of open-minded people out there: people whose childhood indoctrination was not too insidious, or for other reasons didn’t ‘take’, or whose native intelligence is strong enough to overcome it.”²⁶ And he hopes to increase that intelligence through his writing: “If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down.”²⁷ In his own mind, Dawkins is trying to help people. He believes he is breaking the chains of philosophical oppression. In a sense, Dawkins is simultaneously acting as an atheist savior and missionary.

Of course, Dawkins is not alone in the quest for sparking atheistic enlightenment throughout the world. Many atheists approach this enlightenment much in the same way a Christian approaches the preaching of law and gospel. For an atheist, one must first recognize their need for enlightenment. “People who never feel need nor desire to question the beliefs of their upbringing have scant regard for truth...Questioning received beliefs is the activity of any responsible, curious individual.”²⁸ A call to introspection leads one to recognize the need for truth, just as a Christian’s preaching of the Law calls one to recognize their need for the Savior Jesus.

The enlightening truth that atheists preach is the accumulated knowledge of the world through millennia of scientific investigation. Mankind is seen as slowly but surely awakening

²⁵ Dawkins, p.262.

²⁶ Dawkins, p.6.

²⁷ Dawkins, p.5.

²⁸ Harbour, Daniel. "The Price of Knowledge?" *An intelligent person's guide to atheism*. London: Duckworth, 2001. p.45. Print.

from uneducated religious dependence to a realization of the natural ability of himself to answer all of life's questions. "The ever-increasing knowledge of matter in its complexity and potentialities is making it more and more unnecessary to demand a fiat of a Creator to explain the origin of man or of life or of the cosmic process."²⁹ According to atheists, this scientific investigation has essentially led to the dismissal of religion. "It is not that science has disproved religion; it has simply made it irrelevant. The conviction grows that the age of religion is past, that faith is an incongruous feature in our modern mental landscape...some still cling to it, most ignore it, and eventually the far-seeing will be able to have it quietly removed."³⁰ While Christianity aims to enlighten sinful souls through the redeeming message of God's forgiveness, atheism believes itself to be the end process of mankind redeeming himself from the bondage of ignorant, uneducated ideals.

When one evaluates the "educated" literature of atheistic ideals, a very common theme repeatedly appears: Atheists have a special disdain for the moral limitations on behavior preached by all religions, especially Christianity. This has caused Dawkins to attack the morality of Christianity with great effort: "Those who wish to base their morality literally on the Bible have either not read it or not understood it."³¹ In one of his most well-known statements, he exclaims:

"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. Those of us schooled in his ways can become desensitized to their horror."³²

Dawkins is not the only person to characterize God in this way, and he quickly quotes Thomas Jefferson in support of his own view: "The Christian God is a being of terrific character—cruel, vindictive, capricious and unjust."³³

What creates this rejection of opposing beliefs on the part of atheism? Even the cause of the rejection of Christian morals shows a parallelism to Christianity. Both religions reject the

²⁹ Reid, John. *Man without God; an introduction to unbelief*. New York: Corpus, 1971. p.73. Print.

³⁰ Reid, p.73.

³¹ Dawkins, p.237.

³² Dawkins, p.31.

³³ Dawkins, p.31.

other's teachings because of a response to the guilt declared by conscience. Christians respond to their guilt of conscience by, through the Holy Spirit, acknowledging their sin before God and trusting in the forgiveness given in Jesus. This conviction of truth wrought by the Holy Spirit allows a Christian to recognize the truth of the gospel message and deny all attempts to discredit its truth and power. Atheists also respond to their guilt of conscience; however, they do so in the opposite manner—by denying the authenticity of that guilt and the One to whom it is felt. Instead, an atheist creates a new moral standard and “his moral sense decides the path of virtue and right living, but there is no God.”³⁴

This new standard for moral living is also attested by Dawkins: “One way to express our consensual ethics is as a ‘New Ten Commandments.’”³⁵ One example of a list of New Ten Commandments is espoused by Dawkins in *The God Delusion*³⁶, to which he also provides personal amendments. These amendments, given for insight into the morality advocated by Dawkins, are as follows:

- Enjoy your own sex life (so long as it damages nobody else) and leave others to enjoy theirs in private whatever their inclinations, which are none of your business.
- Do not discriminate or oppress on the basis of sex, race, or (as far as possible) species.
- Do not indoctrinate your children. Teach them how to think for themselves, how to evaluate evidence, and how to disagree with you.
- Value the future on a timescale longer than your own.³⁷

These morals are undoubtedly affected by the present day views held by popular culture, something Dawkins would actually use to justify his position.

Dawkins' justification of a new list for moral standards is based on his belief that the moral landscape has shifted over time. He states, “Religious or not, we have all changed massively in our attitude to what is right and what is wrong...In any society there exists a somewhat mysterious consensus, which changes over the decades.” This, he argues, is due to societies becoming more and more “enlightened.”³⁸ Thus, according to atheism, mankind's moral evolution caused from the furthering of his knowledge aids in the shedding of old immoral

³⁴ Graebner, p.2.

³⁵ Dawkins, p.263.

³⁶ Dawkins, p.263-264.

³⁷ Dawkins, p.264.

³⁸ Dawkins, p.265.

standards over time, thus liberating man from uneducated and harmful religious thought. In the same way Christians preach that Christ's obedience removes their evil actions from their account before God, atheists preach that the gradual removal of perceived immoral standards strives to eliminate the evil actions of an idealized atheist society.

The place where one could find the preaching of God's message is well-known to believers and unbelievers alike. One finds God's message in a church. Atheists have also been steadily developing their own message centers throughout the world—the schools, particularly universities. As one Christian explains, “Blasphemies...may be heard by our boys and girls in most of the universities in the land. In psychology particularly the point of view is not only ‘predominantly pagan’ but it is definitely atheistic. Not to the same extent but sufficiently strong to characterize the spirit of the classroom is the atheistic attitude of biology, anthropology, and medicine.”³⁹ Not all educational institutions are proponents of atheistic beliefs, obviously, but one might be surprised at the level of atheistic teaching in schools, especially in colleges. “Among college students the percentage of believers is far larger in the lower than in the higher classes, showing that the influence of the colleges is in a measure responsible for the prevailing unbelief.”⁴⁰ Universities have become, in many ways, the religious centers for atheistic education and outreach (churches) for atheism.

These atheistic churches serve to reveal, curb, and combat false beliefs, similar to the function of many Christian churches and offices. “Throughout the last 400 years, during which the growth of science had gradually shown men how to acquire knowledge of the ways of nature and mastery over natural forces, the clergy have fought a losing battle against science, in astronomy and geology, in anatomy and physiology, in biology and psychology and sociology.”⁴¹ Christian churches and their leaders are here pictured as retreating from one realm of science to another, all clashes taking place only where scientific battlegrounds could possibly be located: the research labs and classrooms of universities across the world.

Despite all of the similarities between so-called “a-theism” and Christianity, there is still a glaring difference that necessitates a description of it being God's *ugly* twin sister. Atheism

³⁹ Graebner, p.10.

⁴⁰ Graebner, p.11.

⁴¹ Hitchens, p.183.

denies the true work of Jesus. Dawkins actually hails Jesus as a great moral example, but then reveals his ignorance in respect to the work of Jesus: “The moral superiority of Jesus precisely bears out my point. Jesus was not content to derive his ethics from the scriptures of his upbringing. He explicitly departed from them.”⁴² Not only does he deny the grace and truth preached throughout the Old Testament, but he fails to recognize that Jesus fulfilled them, and fulfilled them for us.

The teachings and ideals expounded by atheism indeed show it to be more than just a philosophy. Atheism is a religion. Nature is the prevailing deity to which all atheists show reverence. The evidence of the laws of physics at work in nature encompasses the atheist body of irrefutable teachings, and the interpretation and strict adherence to these laws and the knowledge they offer mirrors the faith of any religion. Like all religions, atheism rejects any opposition to its own ideals, and universities serve as churches to preach and spread those ideals. Ultimately, atheism is God’s twin sister because it preaches a crucial salvation for mankind. However, it can only be considered God’s *ugly* twin sister because it does not acknowledge that the true, wisest salvation is found in no one other than our Savior Jesus.

⁴² Dawkins, p.250.

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