

Common Errors of Atheism and Misapplications of Logic to Religion

Faith and Science: "Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason. Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth." "Consequently, methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God. The humble and persevering investigator of the secrets of nature is being led, as it were, by the hand of God in spite of himself, for it is God, the conserver of all things, who made them what they are."

-Catechism of the Catholic Church #159

While much good has come from logical thinking and the application of the scientific method, these methods are only as good as the information available. If facts are erroneous or assumptions are poorly made, then conclusions will be wrong. In simple terms: garbage in, garbage out.

1) Atheists and Naturalists Do Not have Faith: Many people mistakenly believe that Atheists do not have faith. They do. They believe God does not exist for various reasons, but this is still belief. Belief means faith. To truly have no faith in regards to God (either for or against His existence) is properly called Agnosticism. Furthermore, Naturalists and others who believe in the scientific method believe that the laws of Nature are unchanging. They take this faith for granted and apparently give no thought as to why these laws do not change.

2) Scientism is True: Scientism, which clearly has its roots in the positivism movement of Ayer in the early 20th Century, reduces all knowledge to the scientific form of knowledge. The fact that science is a very rational practice, coupled with the undeniable results that such an approach has created, make it a very persuasive argument. Also, it simplifies much of life by reducing complicated matters to "true/false" answers, allowing us to move on to other topics with a minimum of fuss. I don't question the value or importance of science itself, but there are many problems with a philosophy that suggests science is the *only* means of finding the truth, only some of which I will discuss here.

First of all, scientism is a form of philosophy, which is not a science. As scientism denies philosophy, it denies itself. Philosophy seeks to look for truth wherever it may be found, whereas scientism only looks in one place. Furthermore, there are many other areas of non-science that I believe hold truths. Not the least of which include art, music, literature, history and nature. While the scientific method *can* help in discerning the truth in these areas, such help is often not needed. Nor does using such help suddenly make these areas "science." If one believes truth can be found in these other areas, then scientism, after using the scientific method, has debunked itself. The third argument I would make is that science itself is limited in many ways, yet science still points to these things that are outside its ability to test.

But the last point I want to address here (although I could go on) is that science really only looks at the *how*, not the *what*. Science can ask test subjects to imagine one feeling or another (anger, love, sadness, etc) and record patterns of brain activity in some mathematical way. But this series of

numbers is not anger, love or sadness. These series of numbers are just a model of reality, not reality itself. One can look at a similar test and claim a series of numbers is "pain" based on the pattern, but one is not actually experiencing pain. This may seem trivial, as it is difficult to believe that any scientist, no matter how much he may lack in empathy, does not know what pain actually is. So let's take essentially the same argument but apply it to something that a given analyst may not necessarily be expected to have experienced.

There are many analysts who make a lot of money on the stock market by studying patterns on the charts showing the trading value of stocks over time. Just like an analyst who may notice patterns in MRI scans that correspond to emotions, stock analysts can notice patterns that suggest a particular stock to gain or lose big soon. But such patterns do not tell of the truths behind the numbers. Many things can be happening to the company in question: change of management, a lawsuit that has lasting but not disastrous effects, seasonal considerations, building up of capital for a radical new product, and on and on. While money can certainly be made by pure analysis, the most successful only use this as a tool to flag potential companies. Once past this point, they begin to find deeper truths about the company and make decisions based more on experience than on any scientific or mathematical model.

3) God Isn't Real Because He Isn't Found Under a Microscope: There is no quantifiable means of denying God because God is not quantifiable. Jews and Christians believe humans are to serve God, not the other way around. Any evidence found of God in a controlled environment (basically, "if God really exists, then He should prove it by doing this") would be evidence that the Jewish/Christian beliefs were wrong. It would imply God is to serve humans. The evidence for God *does* exist, but it is in an uncontrolled environment (at least by our standards). This is not strange to science. Astronomers do not demand a previously undiscovered asteroid to appear at their whim in order for them to believe such an object exists; they patiently wait for the asteroid to make its appearance in its own place and time.

4) Christians Are Constantly Changing Their Minds:

"If you think you understand quantum mechanics, you don't understand quantum mechanics"
-Richard Feynman, Nobel Prize co-winner for work in Quantum Electrodynamics

One complaint Naturalists have against the religious (with some justification) is that they hear something being said by a Christian that is later proven false in the scientific or historical context, only to hear the Christian change his mind about the significance of the description. Well, when dealing with Fundamentalists (those who believe the Bible is both historic and scientific truth from cover to cover), this is exactly what happens. But the overwhelming majority of Christians belong to churches which allow for the use of metaphors. Scientists do the same. But it is not my intent to discredit the scientific process, only to point out that scientists are faced with the same problem theologians have. Namely, to try to explain what exists, yet cannot be personally experienced.

For one to describe what cannot be seen, felt, smelled, tasted or heard, one *must* speak in metaphors. If I were to say, "I see your point," then of course I am *not* suggesting that I see someone holding a spear. When a teacher of science describes an atom as "screaming through space," he is not suggesting that the nucleus has a mouth and lungs, or that noise can exist in the vacuum that surrounds the atom. He is attempting to describe the atom as moving recklessly out of control. When I see a drawing of an atom with a dot for a nucleus and one or more circles surrounding it with tiny dots on the

circles, I am learned enough to know that most nuclei contain more than one particle, and that electrons do not orbit the nucleus in perfect circles. But I do not call the scientist presenting it a liar. I know the dotted circles represent energy levels and the number of electrons that can exist at each level. I accept this model of reality for the truth it seeks to present, not as a picture of reality itself. This is what Catholics call a formula: something that is not the truth but is useful as a means of helping to understand the truth. Furthermore, what science believes today is rarely what was believed yesterday and probably will be changed or even discarded tomorrow. Albert Einstein's theories have come and gone and come back again several times over the past 90 years or so as perceived problems with his predictions arose only to be reconciled by new discoveries of matter and energy, or in new applications of math. The Big Bang Theory was recently thought of as a Primordial Atom that split up, but now the cosmologists have changed their minds and think the universe was created from an energy source that was not attached to any matter. As it dropped in energy, matter was formed.

A popular image of God is to describe Him as our Father sitting on a throne in the heavens, looking down on His people. Certainly, this image was once widely believed to be "geographically" true when the "science" of the time allowed for such a possibility. But even then, this statement held more meaning than simply being a geographic curiosity. With God as our Father, we are not merely cattle; we are part of His family. By sitting on a throne, we see He is in charge and nothing happens without His consent. Looking down from the heavens means nothing is hidden from Him. These truths have remained unchanged in over 3,400 years despite a growing understanding of the nature of the upper atmosphere and outer space.

In the matter of metaphors and discovery, Naturalists cannot have it both ways. If it is acceptable for science to explain reality by using metaphors, then it is acceptable for other fields to do likewise. If Naturalists allow science to claim discovery as a noble pursuit of man, then it must be so in non-scientific matters. If Naturalists feel it is reasonable for science to change its outlook as new information is made available, then it must agree that it is reasonable for other areas to adjust as well.

5) Christians Believe in a God of the Gaps: Closely related to the "Christians Are Constantly Changing Their Minds" argument (**Topic 4**), they capitalize on an argument that is sadly popular with many Christians: "God exists in the unknown." I can't blame Atheists for turning what is probably the weakest argument possible for God's existence back on us. As science constantly pushes back the borders of the unknown, such Christians will always be supporting a God that is constantly losing ground. The purpose of this thesis is counter to such a concept. In truth, it is actually the other way around: it is science which seeks to fill the gaps of its knowledge, therefore, by default, we have a science of gaps.

6) Seeing is Believing:

"I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe"
-Saint Augustine.

I was at a party once, when the subject of ghosts came up in a conversation a couple friends and I were having. The wife described an experience they had at her parents' house one snowy winter morning. Someone was seen at the window, but quickly disappeared before their eyes. Her husband and some others went outside to see if this person needed help, but no sign was seen of this person - not even footprints in the freshly fallen snow. At the end of the story, the wife called this visitor a ghost. The husband suddenly interrupted her for the first time and said, "It wasn't a ghost." She turned to him and said, "But you saw him!" and he agreed. She said, "You went outside and couldn't find him!" and

he agreed. She said, "You couldn't find footprints in the snow!" and he agreed. Exasperated, she asked, "Then what was it?" He answered, "I don't know, but it wasn't a ghost."

Before I go on, I want to make it clear that this is an article about the existence of God, not about ghosts. I am not advocating the existence of ghosts here, but this is a perfect example of human nature when it comes to belief, and I intend to make the most of it.

Back to the lesson. I want to make two observations on this discourse. The first is how many people will assume that the husband is the reasonable one. This is not because he made a sound argument, but simply because he denies the existence of ghosts. To revisit a previous example, what if this same argument was about gravity instead of ghosts? It would go like this:

She turned to him and said, "But you saw the bowling ball at the top of the tower!" and he agreed. She said, "You saw the ball fall!" and he agreed. She said, "You saw that there wasn't anything pushing it down!" and he agreed. Exasperated, she asked, "Then what caused it?" He answered, "I don't know, but it wasn't gravity."

If my reader will allow me a second brief interruption, I want to address what many may think is a ridiculous example of "proving gravity." In String Theory we will see the greatest scientific and mathematical minds in the world spending 40 years fixated on the potential of String Theory. So far, the only product of their mental labors is to show how gravity can exist mathematically. I'm not saying that such an investment of the world's intellectual capital won't eventually produce results, but if a whole generation of the world's greatest minds think proving gravity is so important, then who am I to argue? Furthermore, there is evidence that suggests that gravity and other "laws" we take for granted might not be the same throughout the universe (suggest seeing *What if the Universe Isn't Uniform* on SciShow Space on Youtube.com for more on this).

Back again to my main point. We see essentially the same discussion, but most people would now say the wife is the reasonable one. To automatically deny a possible explanation simply because one has a prejudice against it is certainly *not* part of the scientific process, but this is what the husband was doing in both examples. Yet, in this culture, we are constantly making judgments, not based on facts, but on our prejudices.

The second, and more important, observation is that some people will continue to believe what they want to believe despite any evidence to the contrary. The husband categorically denies the existence of ghosts even after this experience. If this experience was not enough to at least make him *consider* the possibility of ghosts, then what will? What other characteristics are ghosts supposed to have that, if exhibited that morning, could make this possibility more credible to him? In a word, nothing. When one who won't consider evidence against their faith says, "If I could only have proof that God exists, then I would believe," he is fooling himself and hopes to fool others as to being a reasonable person. Rather than say, "Oh, there must be a God because only He could do this," the reaction to *any* such a demonstration would be, "Great trick, I wonder how it was done?"

7) Explaining Miracles by Science Discredits the Miracle:

There was a terrible flood coming in the land of a man who had the utmost faith in God. As the waters started rising, his neighbor stopped by in a truck and said, "The bridge will wash out soon, but if you come now we can make it." The man said in reply, "Thank you but no; I know God will

save me in my time of need." As the waters claimed all the surrounding land, the man was approached by some members of the Fire Department on a boat. One called out, "the waters will soon become too rough to navigate, but if you come now we can make it." The man said again in reply, "Thank you but no, for nothing is so bad that God cannot save me." The waters continued to rise so that the only safe place for the man was on the roof. A helicopter from the National Guard arrived and one of its members shouted, "The winds will soon be too treacherous to fly in, but if you come now we can make it." The man replied yet again, "Thanks, but no. I have faith that, even as bad as things are now, God can save me." The house finally gave way in the tempest and he drowned. Puzzled, he made his way to the Holy Throne and said, "My God, for all the faith I had in you, why did you let me die?" God answered, "I sent you a truck, a boat and a helicopter. What more did you want?"

This is actually one error I can't really blame the non-believers for being mistaken on, for a good many Christians talk as if the man in this story was sensible in expecting the hand of God to reach out from heaven and pick him up, or perhaps (even better) create an invisible wall around his property so the waters passed him by. There is much that could be said from this story from the theological side, but this portion of the thesis is about the scientific, so I will focus on that here.

As fair warning, I want to explain that this topic will be meaningless to those who are truly convinced that *all* miracles are either made up, exaggerated, can be explained by natural events that are incompletely understood or (the silver bullet for die hard non-believers) was the result of the senses being deceived. This is not a debate over the facts of localized cause and effect; it is a matter of belief one has as to where the original and ultimate cause started (the Prime Motivator, Ultimate Contingency, First Principle, etc.). This section is for those who are not sure what to think, or those who want to believe in both God and nature but are confused with all the background noise (from both Atheists and Christians alike). As C.S. Lewis said in his book *Miracles*, "So (belief in God) is a sort of Rubicon, one goes across; or not. But if one does, there is no manner of security against miracles. One may be in for *anything*." (chapter 11).

I will define a miracle as *any* influence God makes on the events of the universe (our lives in particular) and I don't think many people would disagree with that. Where the problem does seem to come in, as stated before, is when miracles can either be explained by science and/or thought to be exaggerations of fact. Well, if God invented nature and placed man in nature, why would God choose to disregard nature when dealing with man? Just because something can be explained as a natural event does not mean that God wasn't there, working *through* nature. Now we come to what I feel is the core issue, hidden by petty squabbles over whether or not miracles actually take place: *how* do miracles take place?

It appears to me that there are three methods for a "historical" (ie-one that is *not* a metaphor) miracle to manifest itself: 1) by the divine adding and/or deleting from nature, 2) by manipulating the workings of nature or 3) by preordaining nature during creation to have a particular result happen at a given time and place. I will address this list in reverse order.

As a former engineer by education and trade, I believe most miracles manifest themselves by the third method as it recognizes the stability of the universe my profession required. These are the everyday miracles: those so common they are taken for granted as well as the little surprises that

remind us God is still with us. This is also where prayer can impact reality.

If one knew all the positions, vectors and influences of all atoms perfectly and one had the means to process all this information, then all past, present and future positions of the atoms could be predicted perfectly. This would mean one could look at any point in the universe at any time and know exactly what would take place, much like a sky watcher using a computer program to predict the night sky anywhere in the world at any time. Christians believe that God can do just this. It is not because He computes all this, it is because of His omnitemporalness (existing outside of time). Being outside of time, He can see the whole universe at all times. As the author of the Big Bang, He could set the patterns of the particles at the moment of their creation by deciding their initial properties. Once that is set in motion, He can provide guidance to those who listen to act on events coming up. The ten plagues, the Angel of Death that frequently ravaged enemy armies, Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee, the earthquake and solar eclipse that took place when Jesus died and so much more may very well be predictable, natural events. God's omnitemporalness as creator of the universe means He is very capable of timing His plan of salvation to certain unusual events as He sees fit. As He exists in all time at once, He can organize the Big Bang 14 billion years ago while also listening to one's prayer this very night. For a truly inspirational example this, I recommend *The Star of Bethlehem* by Rick Larson which can be found on YouTube. It's an hour long and starts slow, but is well worth it.

The second manifestation can account for many of the miracles that have a very hard time being explained as they are stated, yet don't seem entirely implausible. In a word, they seem surreal. When Moses found the burning bush, we see the theory of the fire triangle challenged because no fuel was consumed. When Lazarus was raised from the dead, the decay of death was reversed, as well as the pathology of whatever caused the fatal damage. In these wondrous examples, it's easy to overlook the fact that we don't really see nature changing much. No rational person will deny that a bush could have been on fire, and modern medicine accepts the idea that a deadly pathogen will behave in a certain way, as will decomposition once death occurs. Rather, what we see is expected natural events acting unexpectedly. Every miracle in the Bible is actually about God reminding us how nature only exists by His command. We know that water can be still as well as it can flow, so if God put the water in motion at His whim, why is it so hard to believe He could make it still for Moses (and some other prophets)? We don't think it's anything special when a single farmer or fisherman makes a great harvest that can feed the multitudes, so why is it so hard to believe that Jesus (who is God) did the same?

The first manifestation is on the order of what the man in the leading story hoped to see: a story worthy of a Cecil B. DeMille or (for the younger generation) a George Lucas movie scene. While I believe such miracles can and do happen, my religious studies so far have led me to believe that, to be a "bare bones" Christian, one need only believe four such miracles took place (although Christians with a mature faith will have added many more, most importantly the changing of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus). The Creation *of* nature is the ultimate addition *to* nature, so it obviously needs to be included. Free Will and its attendant Reason and Morality must also be included here, because Naturalism does not allow these things to exist. The pregnancy of the Virgin Mary is the third miracle of Christian belief that could only have happened by adding the divine (ie-supernatural) to nature, or else Jesus was not who He said He was: the Son of God. The Resurrection of Jesus is the fourth and final such miracle. I want to point out that the Resurrection was not the same as bringing Lazarus back from the dead. The damage to Jesus was not reversed: the stigmata, including what would be a fatal spear wound, was still present. Furthermore, Jesus had changed somehow (which was foreshadowed during the Transfiguration on the mountain (found in the three synoptic Gospels and alluded to in 2 Peter)). His closest friends who knew Him for years had difficulty in recognizing Him after only three days of separation. Jesus did exist on the Earth for some time after the Resurrection,

but His body was now more than the natural one He was born into, and in ways we can't truly comprehend.

A final note on the first category of miracles. Please note that I said these four miracles were the *minimum* one needed to believe in to be a Christian. I say this because, without them, any other Biblical miracle would be meaningless. With no universe, we would have no need for salvation because we would not exist. Without Free Will, we would never have fallen and therefore have no need of salvation. Without Jesus being born of Mary, we would have no savior from this fallen state. Without Him rising from the dead, we would not have known that He was indeed God and savior (as opposed to being a madman or a liar). These four miracles are not the end of first manifestation miracles; they are the groundwork for all miracles regardless of their manifestation.

8) Atheism is the Friend of Science: Many Atheists have made the false assumption that Christianity is hostile towards science. Only Fundamentalism is by necessity in conflict with modern scientific ideas. Fundamentalists may be a loud minority of Christians, but they are still the minority (and a small one at that). I have posted several catechisms in this Part that proves the Catholic Church (which comprises 50% of all Christians worldwide) not only accepts science, but encourages it as long as it follows moral guidelines.

But regardless of the truth, many Atheists seem to think that religion is either holding back science at best or is hostile to science at worst. They hold the gag order the Church placed on Galileo as evidence to this. This thesis is not the place to explain the whole story, but in short Galileo actually had many influential members of the Church who favored his views; including much of the Jesuit order of priests (who must each hold a doctorate) and even Pope Urban VIII. Rather than use this goodwill to promote his ideas, Galileo chose to first publicly humiliate the entire Jesuit order, and then did the same to the Pope himself. When those who didn't have a scientific background finally brought him to trial, he not only had alienated Church members who likely would have supported him on theological grounds (indeed, prior to being publicly insulted by Galileo, the Pope had already gone out of his way to give Galileo a chance to redeem himself for attacking the Jesuits), but he was justly seen as hostile to the Church. Even then, the court deliberately excluded heresy as a charge. Galileo was essentially tried for heresy, but because it was not an official charge he was saved from being punished as one.

But would a society that is based on Atheism actually support the scientific community? Atheism, as we see it today, has only been allowed to grow in Christian cultures and then transplanted itself elsewhere. Certainly there were people in all times and places that doubted the existence of whatever gods their culture believed in, or at least if those gods got involved with man. But for individuals and groups to actively dispute the religious beliefs of the majority, this only has taken place in Christian lands. There are places today (outside predominately Christian lands) where to declare oneself an Atheist is a capital crime! Certainly, there have been some examples of intolerance, even extreme intolerance, towards Atheists in Christian lands. But in the end, the Christian virtues of Charity and Kindness, coupled with Christ's personal example of letting people choose for themselves, has provided the atmosphere necessary for Atheism to grow in an organized way with philosophical discussion.

Because of these realities, Atheism is a relatively new philosophy (technically about 350 years old, but only about 200 years old as a serious philosophy) and, for the most part, had to co-exist with Christianity and therefore assumed the values of Christianity (all the classical philosophers of Atheism had a deep, if hostile, respect for the Church; it is the modern generation of zealots that treat it with

disdain). How a predominately Atheistic society, free from the influence of Christianity, would look towards education and science has very few historical examples to give empirical evidence. Sweden may seem like a good test subject, but I propose that it is too early because Christian values are still very much a part of the culture even if most of its citizens do not officially practice it. We really only have two social movements that have taken place that not only denied the existence of God (or gods) but sought to destroy the "unwanted" influences of religion as well: socialism and its twin brother communism.

For socialism, we have Nazi Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. We see Nazis use science to create wonder weapons and to determine the most efficient gas to use for genocide. Nazi medical experiments were so ghastly and twisted that I won't discuss it here (read *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by William Shirer if you really want to know what kind of things went on). We see Stalin bring Russia into the 20th century from an industrial perspective at the cost of deliberately killing more people than Hitler did (and mostly through forced starvation). Yet the only notable products that were created by USSR scientists were weapons. Even the Soviet Union's famed space program was actually built on the advancements of German scientists - spoils of the war against Nazi Germany.

For communism, we see any kind of education as a threat to its existence. Communist insurgencies typically began by assassinating teachers, philosophers and scientists in addition to political opponents. If the insurgency was successful, then survivors were rounded up and disappeared in concentration camps. Pol Pot, in particular, effectively murdered 25% of Cambodia's population in efforts to de-urbanize the country and force people into a purely agricultural state. Hardly a formula to encourage education, much less science. China is a curious exception to all of this, although most of the country was also forced backwards intellectually and economically with massive loss of life. There are enclaves of (relatively) free thought and industry designed to subsidize the rest of the nation. This experiment by China is not allowed in lands it brought under its influence, however.

So, with what few but powerful examples of how science might fare in an Atheist culture, we do not see anything I consider encouraging. So far, the role of science is either to create more efficient ways of killing people, or to be the expressed and hated enemy of the people. Only China has provided a third alternative: to be slaves of the ignorant masses.

9) The Historical Perspective is the Correct Approach:

"How can we expect to successfully persecute the Christians when they are doing a better job in taking care of our subjects with their poverty than we are with our wealth?"

-Unconfirmed letter of a Roman Governor to the Emperor.

The historical approach to the Bible is an insidious form of corruption. Superficially, it appears as a logical way to understand the Bible. Indeed, much good can be learned from this approach and, if used properly, is an excellent tool. It can help make the long ago and far away seem more real when expressed in terms easily understood. The trap is that the history can become more important than the truth the history is attempting to explain. It is the theological equivalent of the old adage "can't see the forest for the sake of the trees." There is also the risk of forgetting that the Historical Truth is connected to Biblical Truth with a "both/and" relationship, not an "either/or" (see **Topic 10**).

We can avoid the trap if we realize that the Bible is the Truth of God's Presence and Revelation

to us, not a lesson on science or history. Catholics would call the Truth of God's Presence and Revelation the *essential* element of the Bible, whereas science and history are mere *accidentals* (in the vernacular, the word "superficial" would be appropriate). The essence of a human is the person he or she is. The type of hair, color of eyes, skin tone, height, weight, etc. are the accidentals of the person. Hair can change color, body parts might be amputated, but the essence of the person remains the same. What a person looks like is important in its own way and helpful when used in proper context, but variations in these values do not make a person who he or she is. Changes to them do not make one more or less of a person. Each person has his or her own unique dignity and selfness that is neither superior nor inferior to any other person.

Attempting to explain away all Biblical miracles as strange but naturally occurring events is a very common example of falling into this trap. Just because God acts through the very nature He created does not diminish His role in the miracle (**Topic 7**). But I will use the unconfirmed quote above for my example here.

While I was attending a non-denominational service, the preacher made the leading quote. I forgot who the governor was and have not been able to contact the preacher to find out. My own efforts to track down the author of this quote, however, led me to what is a perfect example of the dangers of using the historical approach. I cannot, at this time, confirm or deny this quote was ever made, but the *sentiments* expressed in it are historically accurate. This accuracy is supported by numerous Atheist web sites that claim Constantine was not really devout in his conversion to Christianity, but instead used it for political and economic gain. By consent, Atheists have agreed to the *message* of the opening quote, even if no such letter actually existed.

The early Christians focused on taking care of people, especially those society ignored. They provided medical care (or at least comfort) to the sick, educated the poor, gave economic assistance to widows and crippled, rescued babies abandoned on dung piles and more. This was being done when being a Christian was a capital offense. This was done without taxes or public advertising. At the same time, the Roman Empire was suffering from attacks on all borders and rampant inflation at home. This put Rome in a very difficult situation financially. The skeptical theory is that Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in order to relieve the Roman Treasury of social services by tapping into the welfare infrastructure already in place by the Christians. Exactly how Constantine was going to take what belonged to a few, poor Christians and distribute it to the whole Empire has not been satisfactorily answered to the best of my knowledge. But regardless, the idea is that Constantine converted to Christianity, not because he believed in it, but because it was a economical/political move.

It is not wrong to appreciate how history takes place, or to ignore the impact of greed on history. It's the things left out of this explanation that cause the danger I speak of. If God had not come to Earth and shown how to take care of society's outcasts through personal example as well as commandment, then there would be no Christians to "save the day" for Constantine. Furthermore, by focusing on Constantine and his alleged political motivation for converting, it is easy to take our focus off the Christians before his conversion. For the early Christians, painful death was a very real possibility simply for being kind to the helpless. Should we not focus our attention on the Christian whose faith was so strong that he risked his life to ensure a widow didn't starve to death rather than care whether or not an Emperor was sincere in his conversion? And this brings me to my next topic, the issue of "either/or" attitudes many Atheists seem to have.

10) Reality and Religion Must be "Either/Or," Not "Both/And": I just recently provided an example of how there are those who claim that Constantine did not truly convert to Christianity

because he believed, but rather because he stood to gain politically. I doubt that legalizing Christianity would suddenly end the whole Empire's social services woes, but, for the sake of this argument, let us suppose it did. So what? Could not Constantine still have come to believe in the truth of Christianity? Is there any proof that he was simply using Christians (a diary of someone who knew him well or a historian who questioned witnesses)? Is not his Baptism on his deathbed some indication that it was more than simply Earthly gain for him? My own research suggests that he was faithful to Christianity, but was pragmatic in dealing with the drastic changes he was making to the still largely pagan Empire.

There are times when "either/or" arguments are appropriate: when they are mutually exclusive of each other. The classical idea of Materialism (which held that matter always was and always will be) is in an either/or situation with the Big Bang Theory (which holds that matter was created about 14 billion years ago). But "both/and" relationships are always *possible* when there is no such conflict. One can believe in *both* the Big Bang theory *and* that God made the universe (Creationism in its literal sense) because there is no conflict if one accepts that the Big Bang was God's method of creation. Indeed, it was a Catholic priest who developed the idea of Big Bang in the first place (**Topic B**).

11) The Early Christians Didn't Know How Small the Earth Was:

The Earth, in relation to the distance of the fixed stars, has no appreciable size and must be treated as a mathematical point.
-Ptolemy *Almagest*, (book 1, chapter 5)

This "Historical Perspective" idea is that early Christian beliefs "only" developed as they did because they exaggerated how big and important the Earth was compared to the universe. They often misrepresent the Church's opposition to Galileo as evidence of this. By thinking the Earth was like a plate (with the Mediterranean Sea in the shallow center) and the rest of the universe as an inverted bowl on which stars, planets, the moon and the sun moved across, Christians placed Earth as the center of the "grand scheme of things." Furthermore, the Earth was big while the stars, planets, sun and moon were small. This belief is faulty on at least two accounts.

First, this theory is based on the assumption that all Christians still followed the Jewish model of the universe. No doubt a great many still did. But Ptolemy (the father of modern astronomy) lived across the 1st and 2nd Century A.D., and most of the New Testament books were still being written during his lifetime. Now, there was never a shortage of intelligent members in the Church. Saint Luke, who wrote the third gospel and Acts of the Apostles, was a physician. Saint Paul was trained in the best school by the best teacher to be a lawyer of scripture. The Christians had much success with the Greeks, whose culture was the intellectual jewel of the Roman Empire. As time passed, the greatest doctors of Christian theology, including Saints Thomas Aquinas, Ignatius and Augustine, came along. All were highly-educated men and well-versed in classical thought. None of them saw a conflict between Ptolemy's teachings and the Christian faith. I have already spoken of the debt education and the sciences owe to Christian efforts. Given the degree of respect Christianity has to science, one can hardly make a case that the Church was ignorant of Ptolemy. If the Christians (or at least the learned ones) knew for 1,900 years that the Earth was that small when compared to the universe and still found no conflict of faith, then the whole argument of our faith being based on an exaggerated idea of the Earth's importance to the universe falls apart.

Secondly, to assume that Christians would build a religion around an exaggerated impression of how important humans are is contrary to human experience. Regardless if the world was big or small, people at that time thought the world was a very scary place. Something harsh Roman persecution

would have done little to dispel. I suggest that telling such people that the world was not even a pin prick to the closest star would not have meant much, as they had enough to worry about with what was just on the other side of the hill. If they thought of this fact at all, it was probably comforting to know that something so far away could never hurt them. Even if religion was built around the idea of the world being big, it would still have been built with humility and fear of a persecuted people, not pride and bravado of a world empire.

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