

# Agnostic-Atheism and the Question of Evidence

I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.  
-Revelation 3:15-16

Much can and has been said about the Christian-atheism debate in the 200+ years since atheism became a semi-organized faith. And I feel it is proper to call this an argument against Christianity as opposed to theism as a whole. Atheism, at least the kind hotly debated in our culture, was a child of agnostics who sought the truth of Jehovah, and these agnostics are children of those who had a very perverted idea of what Jehovah is like. Ironically, these perverse ideas came from the Christian and Jewish notion that God wants us to explore this vast and wondrous universe He created for us. By encouraging us to explore, some people arrived at bad conclusions.

One of the lessons from the book of Job is that honest rebellion is not only acceptable in God's eyes, but preferable to mindless orthodoxy. Job's argument was truthful, and he never disrespected God (although he was losing patience from his friends' condescending remarks). In the end, God confirmed Job's guiltlessness and demanded atonement from his friends (who were perfectly defending what they believed about God's justice). But note that their behavior can accurately be described as having a strong belief (in this case, Job's guilt), not only with insufficient evidence, but in open opposition to any additional evidence. They saw Job's suffering as the one and only relevant piece of evidence to be considered. This is known as "bad faith."

Now fast-forward to agnostic W.K. Clifford (1845-1879) who said, "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." The lessons of Job are just as relevant today, as this statement is at the heart of those who oppose Christianity. This statement can also be seen echoed in Aldous Huxley's (who was a Hinduist leaning towards agnosticism) claim, "The deepest sin against the human mind is to believe things without evidence." Agnostic Bertrand Russell's famous teapot is perhaps the epitome of this concept, and it has inspired other famous analogies such as the Pink Unicorn, the Flying Spaghetti Monster, and the Dragon in the Garage. While all these concepts address bad faith, the unspoken implication is that if one does have a belief based on sufficient evidence, then one believes in "good faith."

In an interview (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKa8X5vtjc>) with Dr. Peter Kreeft that aired on 26 Sep 2022 (and was a major inspiration for this paper), Dr. Jordan Peterson paraphrased Revelation 3:15-16 (above) and concluded: "[Jesus'] harshest judgment isn't reserved for outright, unrepentant, committed sinners, and certainly not for people who are 100% committed to the courage of their faith, but, too, the judgment is harshest for people who play both ends against the middle and who won't commit. And one of the things I've started to toy with is the idea that faith is actually a subset in some sense of existential courage." (min 27:31 - 28:03) In other words, God does not seem to care if one believes or disbelieves in Him in good faith. On the other hand, God seems to take major offense at avoiding the issue. This observation is in full agreement with the quote from Revelation above. God seems to prefer an atheist who disbelieves in Him out of good faith than one who believes in Him out of bad faith, and holds those who don't take faith seriously as contemptible.

I know that is a very controversial thing to say, but controversy is not in itself proof something is wrong. The story of Job also shows us that. I do, however, want to briefly address those who may be acting on bad faith, yet bad faith is all they are capable of understanding. I don't see anywhere in

scripture that implies doing the best one can is a sin simply because one's best isn't good enough. Indeed, we see God taking greater delight in one who maximized what little they had. Jesus honoring the widow who gave two coins to the offertory (Mark 12:41-44) comes to mind.

But as for those who do have the capacity to make informed decisions, there is a call from both God and man (as Clifford and Huxley have shown) to look at whatever evidence is available and to form our beliefs around them after honest reflections and in a rational manner. I believe this can lead one to one of the three religious positions. If the evidence points to materialism, then one should be an atheist. If the evidence points to God, then one should be a theist (for reasons I won't detail here, ultimately Christianity). If the evidence seems inconclusive, then one should be an agnostic. If new evidence is presented, then one should re-evaluate one's beliefs. Based on what is at stake, it seems to me that agnostics ought to deliberately seek such evidence. As C.S. Lewis said in *God in the Dock*, "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." I do not like to scare people into religion (such as with Pascal's Wager), but this is a matter that needs to be seriously addressed, not simply entertained.

Now that good faith, bad faith, and God's apparent attitude towards them has been explained, let us look to the real world. I am afraid that skeptics are going to get the pointy end of this paper, but I am not sure how it can be otherwise. If the skeptic told the theist, or *vice versa*, that after reviewing all available evidence, he has decided his initial beliefs were wrong, and will change his beliefs to conform with the other, then no objection or explanation is needed. It is foolishness to talk someone out of sharing your own point of view (although I have met those so anxious to disagree with me that they changed their opinions simply to keep the argument going).

But when a skeptic tells a Christian that they have evidence that God does not exist, then the good faith Christian must acknowledge this evidence and evaluate it. The burden is on the Christian to show that either the facts are wrong or that the facts are not in conflict with Jehovah. If the Christian can do neither, then the Christian should either do more research or consider that God does not exist. The one thing the good faith Christian cannot do is disregard the evidence, as ignoring it makes the Christian a believer out of bad faith. But things get easily confused when it is the other way around.

If a Christian provides evidence for God it seems, the skeptic does not have to accept it. It doesn't matter if the God Theory is the only theory man can think of that can explain the evidence. The skeptic can say that *maybe* a new theory will be thought up that will account for it. Or perhaps they will rehash a failed theory (such as Darwin's Theory to explain the existence of life on this planet), and claim that *maybe* new evidence will come around to validate the failed theory after all. What is going on here?

If one is not careful, the skeptic will never accept the here and now like the Christian does; he will always hold out for the future. When the Christian is debated, the Christian only has to lose one minor point to fail, whereas the skeptic can lose every point because their faith in science says evidence might someday be discovered that validates him in the end (which, let's call it what it is, is a religion dedicated to the god of science).

This skeptic is acting on bad faith regardless of how educated he believes he is. The sad thing is, he actually thinks otherwise. In a famous debate at Biola University, Christopher Hitchens debated William Lane Craig. During this debate, Hitchens said, "After all, Dr. Craig, to win this argument, has to ... prove to certainty. He's not just saying there might be a God, because he has to say that there must be one." This has been the defining statement of what is called the agnostic-atheist, and it came from perhaps

the most respected non-Christian that Christian theologians like to discuss.

The agnostic-atheist argument is essentially a "bait and double switch" scam. The agnostic-atheist baits the Christian from the position of the agnostic. He will claim that if sufficient evidence were provided, then he would become a Christian. So the Christian, happy to try to win over a convert, expends much energy making a case for the evidence of God. If this person were a true agnostic, then he should consider the evidence and decide if a change in his beliefs are in order. But instead, the agnostic-atheist switches to the atheist position, claiming he doesn't believe anything that was said because it is not "proven to certainty." Sadly, many erstwhile, but bad faith, Christians deserve this rebuttal, as they never had a legitimate argument to begin with. But a Christian speaking about God in good faith deserves to know why his argument was not convincing. It is at this point that the agnostic-atheist makes the second switch back to agnostic by saying something along the lines of, "I don't have to explain why you didn't convince me, because I don't have a belief to defend. It is you that has to convince me to believe."

Of course, no evidence presented by the Christian will work here because the Christian is in the here and now, whereas the agnostic-atheist is in the unpredictable future. This is clearly an unfair double standard for evidence, but once one gets to this point it is almost impossible for the Christian to recover. Any attempt to demonstrate the double standard at this point will be too long and complicated to keep anyone's attention. But the bad faith the agnostic-atheist has is oftentimes not deliberate, nor by those who are normally irrational. Philosophers and scientists who otherwise embrace rational thought and normally bow to the evidence (such as Hitchens, Bertrand and Carl Sagan) were agnostic-atheists in practice if not by name. Vladimir Lenin would see them as "useful idiots," but I think many of them are suffering from cognitive dissonance. I believe that many of them don't realize that they are being inconsistent in at least one of two ways: ignoring disagreeable present-day facts in favor of agreeable hopes and dreams of the future, and/or requiring an impossible degree of certainty before considering theological evidence. Theoretically, a third form of cognitive dissonance inherently exists within the bait and double switch itself (they are simultaneously saying they have a disbelief against God and at the same time saying they have no belief one way or the other), but to call it out explicitly is likely to encourage an emotional response.

A better approach is for the Christian to try to make a couple of "snuck premises," or ground rules, before going on to present his evidence; he may be able to destroy the agnostic-atheist dynamic before it starts. If the Christian is asked to present his case, the Christian should ask what evidence looks like to them. If he gives an answer that is agreeable to the Christian, then he can no longer claim the evidence was irrelevant. He may dispute the evidence in a rational way, but he cannot simply dismiss it without becoming a hypocrite. More likely, however, he will claim evidence that can be scientifically proven. The Christian should never accept this, no matter how upset the skeptic gets. Science can only test nature, and Jehovah transcends nature. Therefore, science cannot prove or disprove God. However, there are many scientific discoveries that are best answered by what is known as Intelligent Design. Being prepared to discuss intelligent design takes effort, but I assure you that science is firmly supporting Christianity today, and is providing even more evidence every day. The resistance of certain scientists to God is *not* based on scientific discovery, but a refusal to believe in the results of their own work. An excellent book to help the apologist in talking about Intelligent Design is Lee Strobel's book *The Case for the Creator*. It is rather long, but it is clearly explained.

Likewise, simply clarifying that the discussion will only address what is known today will destroy the skeptic's opportunity to assume that future scientific discoveries will validate him. One may not be able to convince him one is right, but he can't casually dismiss anything one says either

without exposing his bad faith. He will be forced to address your topics just like the Christian has to address the skeptic's topics.

Finally, if these efforts fail, call him out as being unreasonable, a hypocrite, or acting in bad faith. He is likely to deny these claims, but by now he has proven by his own words that this is exactly what he is. He is likely to gaslight the Christian, but don't fall for it. There is almost always an audience, so don't worry about winning this bad faith actor over. Instead, worry about keeping this bad faith actor from influencing the audience by remaining calm, rational and factual. Most people believe Dr. Craig won the debate against Hitchens at Biola University, even though Hitchens never changed his opinion. Contrary to what Hitchens claimed Dr. Craig had to prove (this was an example of a snuck premise), what Dr. Craig really had to prove was that the God Theory was the better argument.

In the end, I am not so much concerned who wins or loses the argument. Losing arguments forced me to learn, and I have had a 100% success rate in later finding counter-arguments to the arguments I had previously lost. And it has been obvious that while I continue to grow in understanding, the skeptical world does not. Despite their professed love of scientific discovery, virtually all their arguments against God are based on pre-1920 scientific knowledge. Scientific skeptics (and the agnostic-atheist normally demands scientific proof of God) are over a century out-of-date with scientific evidence for God. What I am concerned with is that the Christian apologist gets a fair chance to present his case. Being aware of, and being able to overcome, the agnostic-atheist's bait and double switch trap is an invaluable tool in saving a lot of wasted energy.

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