

## 035 SS Atheism

The term atheism denotes a belief position that denies any theism. It proactively affirms the absence of any THEOS in the denier's worldview. It is primarily an epistemological claim although it also purports to delimit reality in conformity with this epistemological claim. In its more virulent form, atheism would prefer banish THEOS from the universe unconditionally.

Pascal well described the slippery slope from theism to deism to atheism which emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century just as he had predicted. If theological beliefs become buttressed, as it were, by scientific evidence then it becomes no longer a proper **faith** position. Indeed, to the extent that faith is involved at all, attention is shifted from the THEOS to a more rationalist "deistic" position no longer in need of a personal and loving Creator. This well conforms with the 18<sup>th</sup> century worldview featuring the mechanization of the world picture. Today it often characterizes beliefs too closely linking the finger of God, as for example with the Big Bang. In each case it is possible that revisions in the domain of scientific understanding could undermine theological convictions if these are too closely tied with the provisional findings of science.

The problem of tying religious beliefs with the findings of science is well documented by Newton and Laplace who claimed to have no need for the God hypothesis in operating the universe.

On the Laplace model [Nebular Hypothesis] the universe could have begun in a state of utter chaos. What we see today is simply the relatively stable residue of all that fallout. While the available evidence does not invalidate a theistic interpretation, he claimed that an atheistic position is at least equally plausible. Indeed it is perhaps more probable and certainly the simpler alternative if Occam's razor were used as a criterion of selection. Today we must deal with variations of this same theme. Sometimes perceived imperfections in the operation of the universe are brought forward as evidence for a highly incompetent THEOS.

The deep problem in this regard would be to utilize science to validate or invalidate theism. An equally serious problem would be to misuse a theistic perspective in an attempt to validate science or to invalidate the findings of science.

Indeed there are proper and valid ways to correlate the *provisional* truths arising from science with the eternal truths that are *partially* accessible, revealed and expressed according to valid theological criteria. In the first instance this correlation is well noted by the famous Two Books (Scripture and Nature) approach of Calvin.

Altogether, atheism is a belief position that, while compatible with the findings of science, is not validated by the findings of science. It is not an acceptable "default" position as Anthony Flew eventually conceded. As Kenny has argued, the absence of appropriate and compelling evidence required for an rational person to choose would make atheism every bit as credulous as is theism.

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