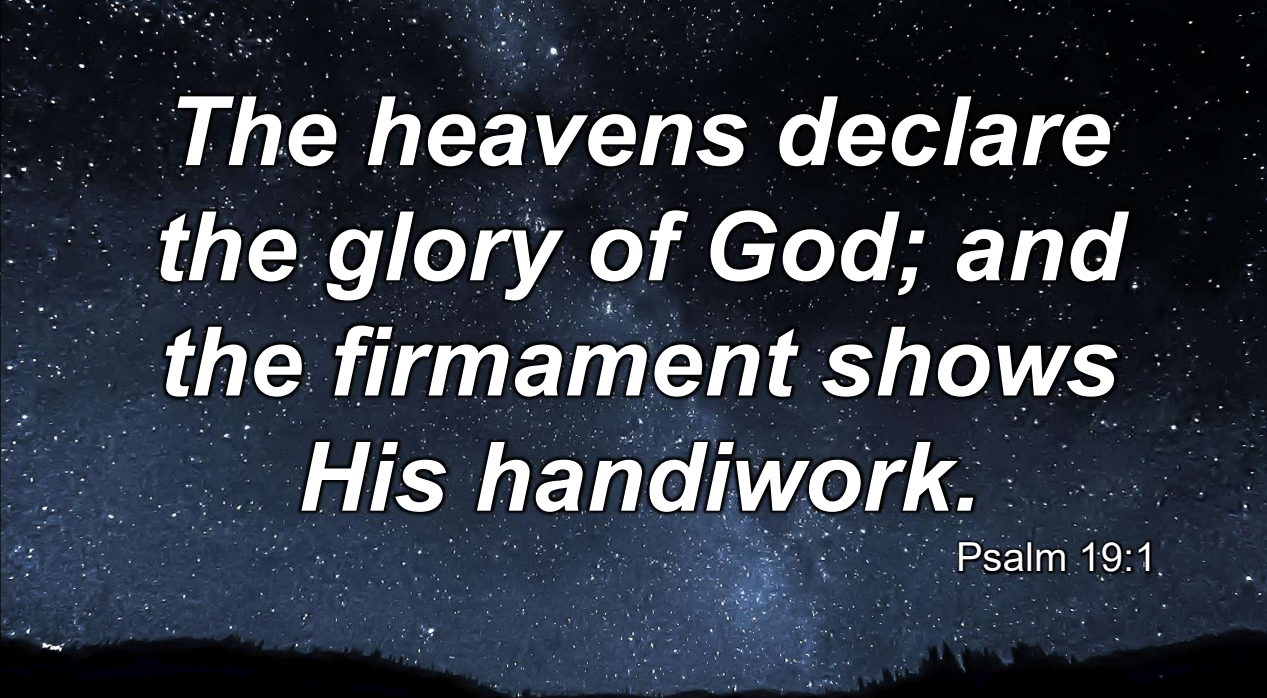


# Contemporary Atheism

02 Popular Atheism: Rhetorical

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.  
Provost  
Professor of Philosophy and Apologetics  
Norman L. Geisler Chair of Christian Apologetics  
Southern Evangelical Seminary, Rock Hill, South Carolina, USA

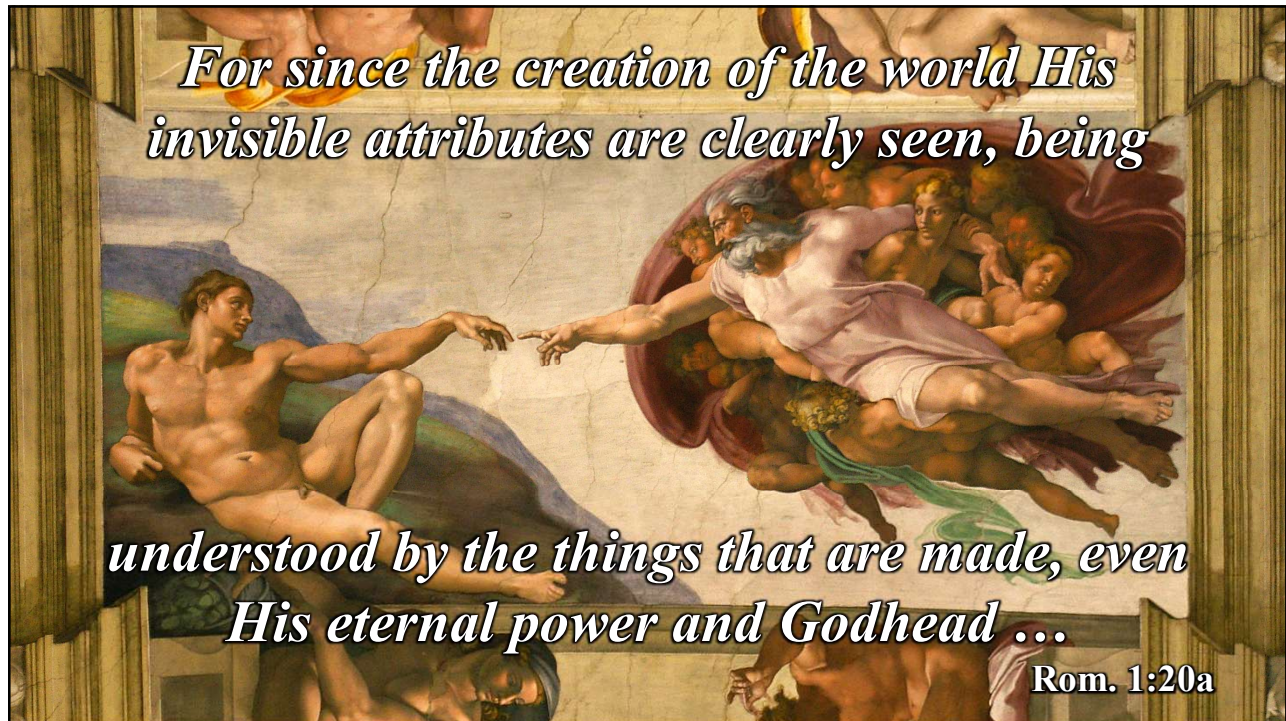


***The heavens declare  
the glory of God; and  
the firmament shows  
His handiwork.***

Psalm 19:1

***The heavens declare  
His righteousness,  
And all the peoples  
see His glory.***

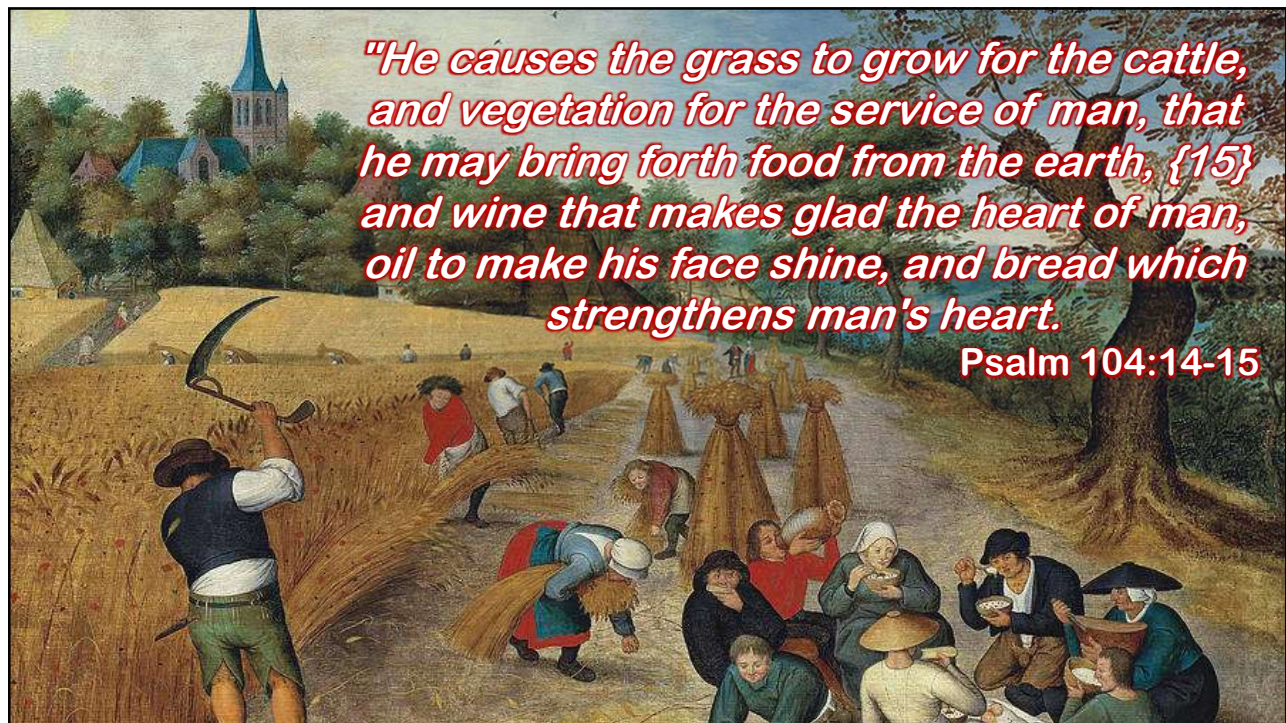
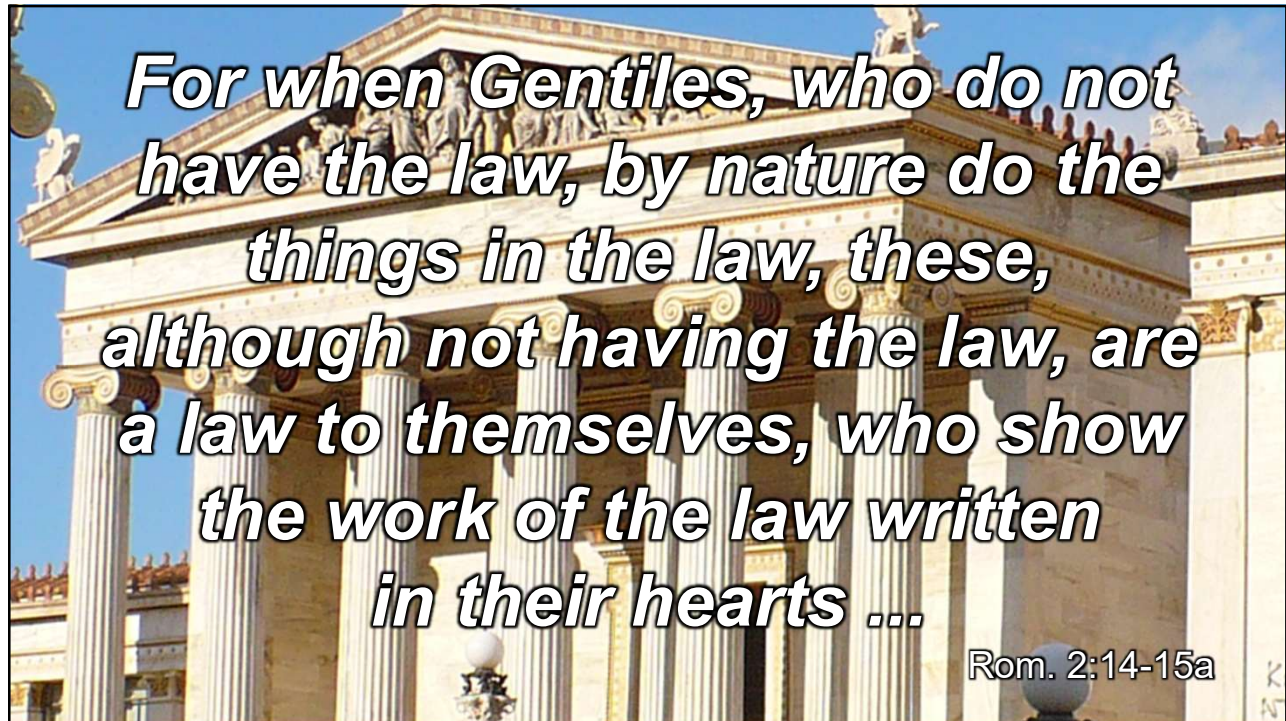
Psalm 97:6

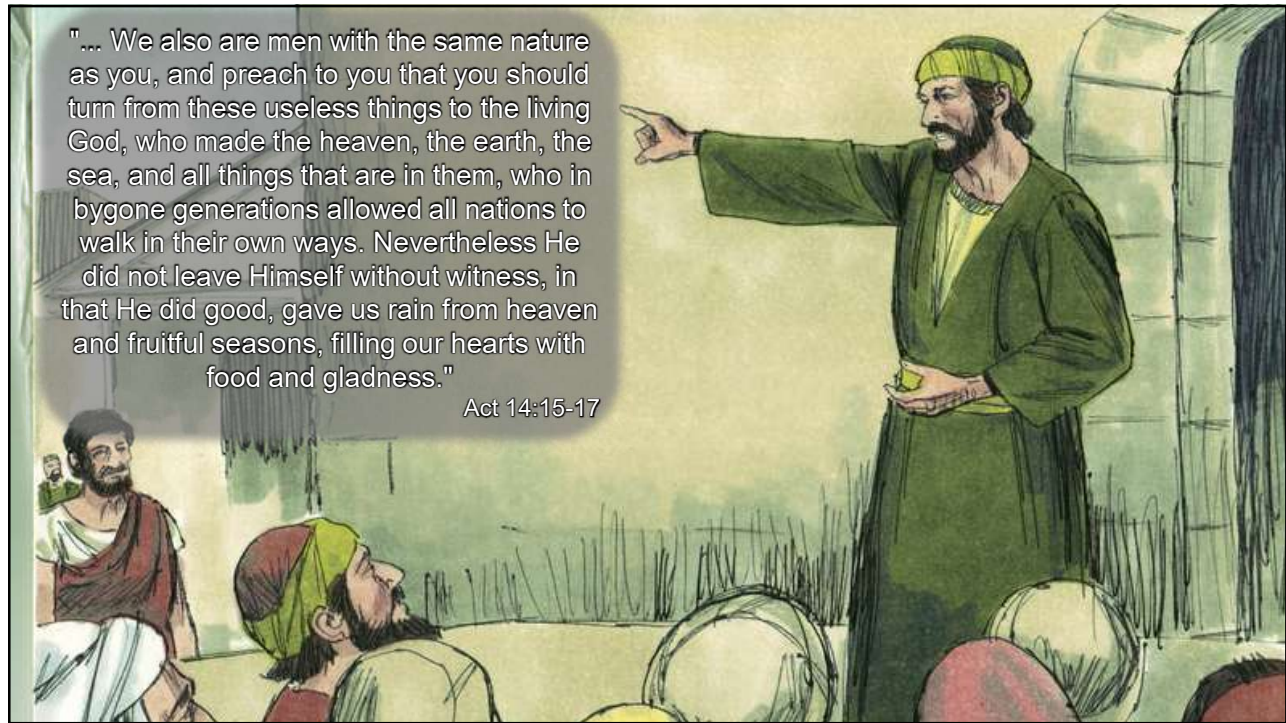


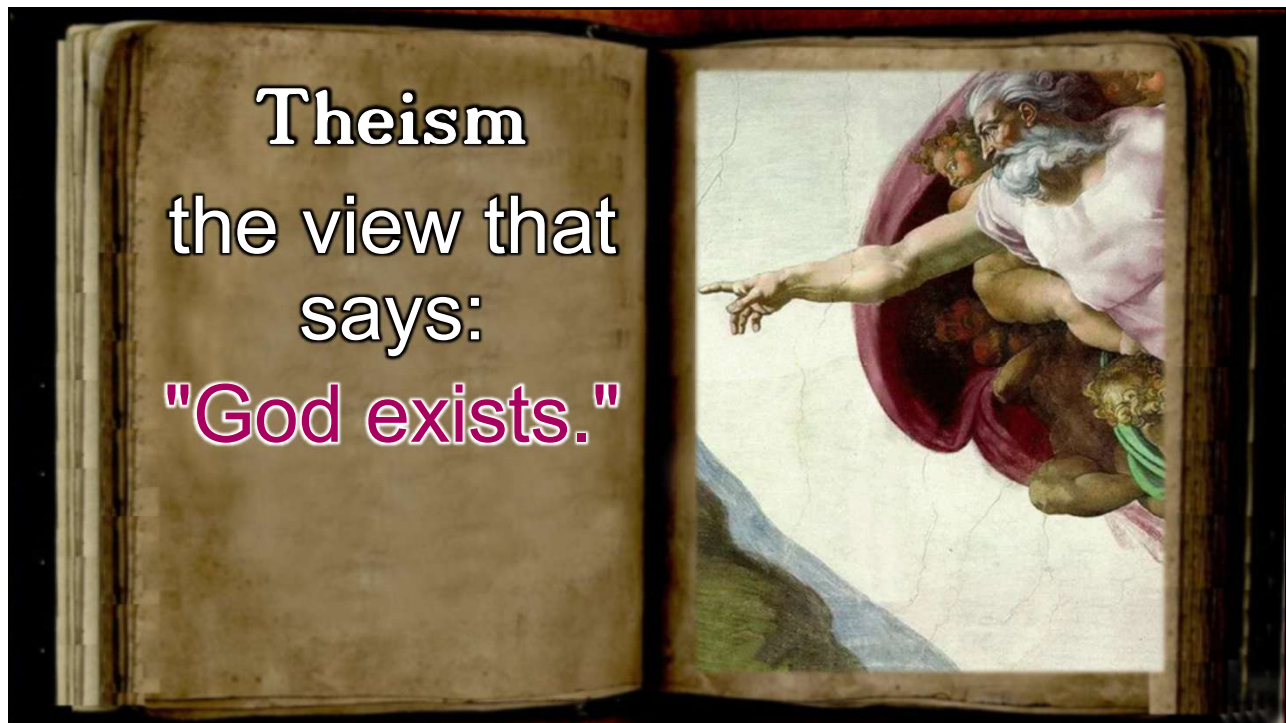
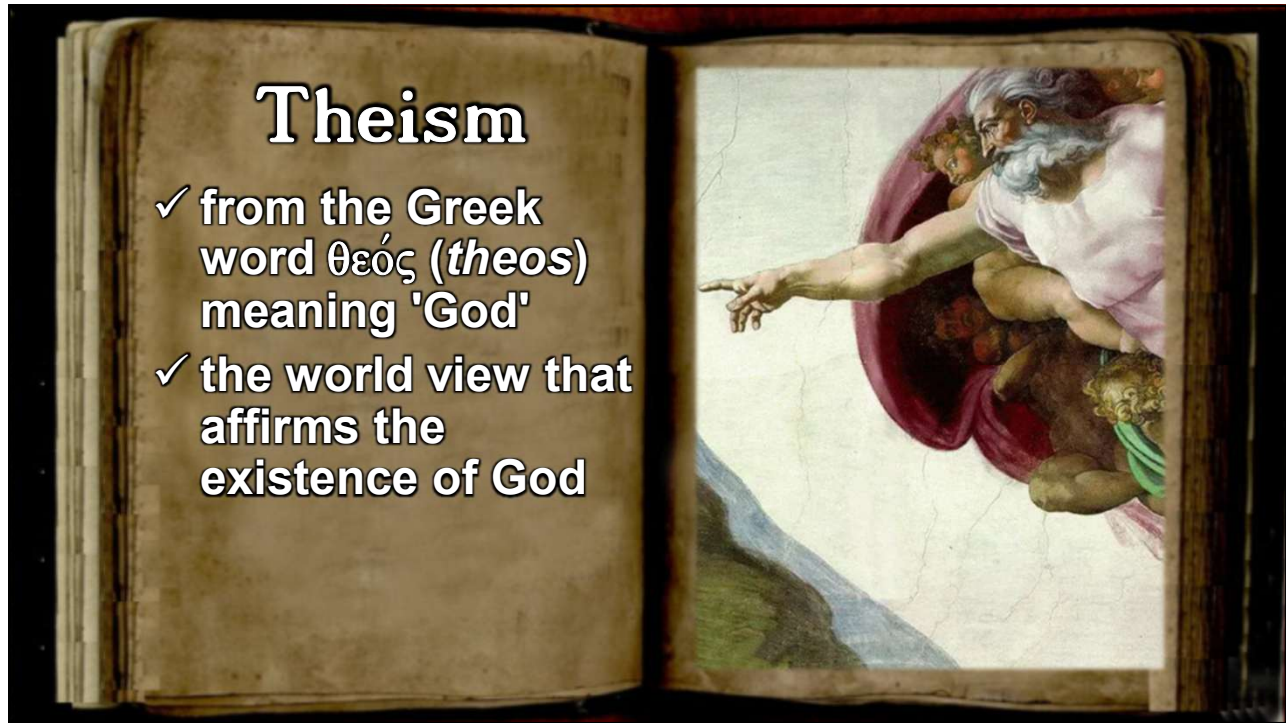
***For since the creation of the world His  
invisible attributes are clearly seen, being***

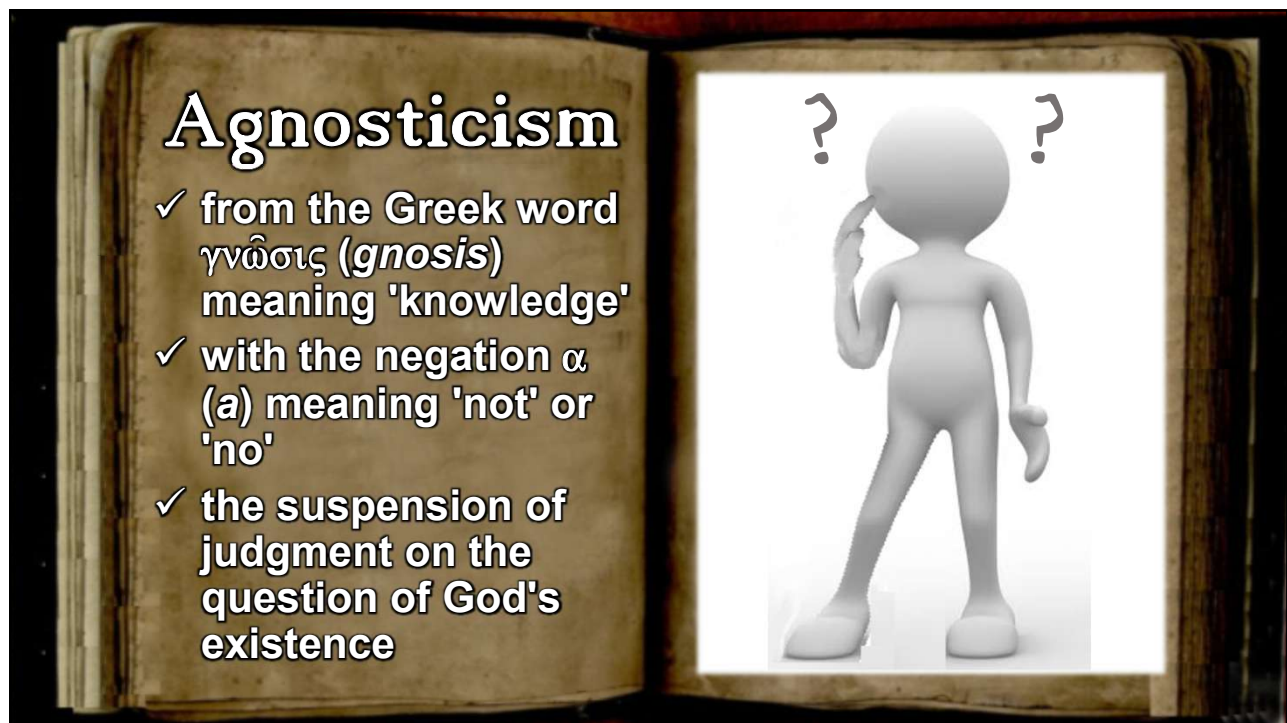
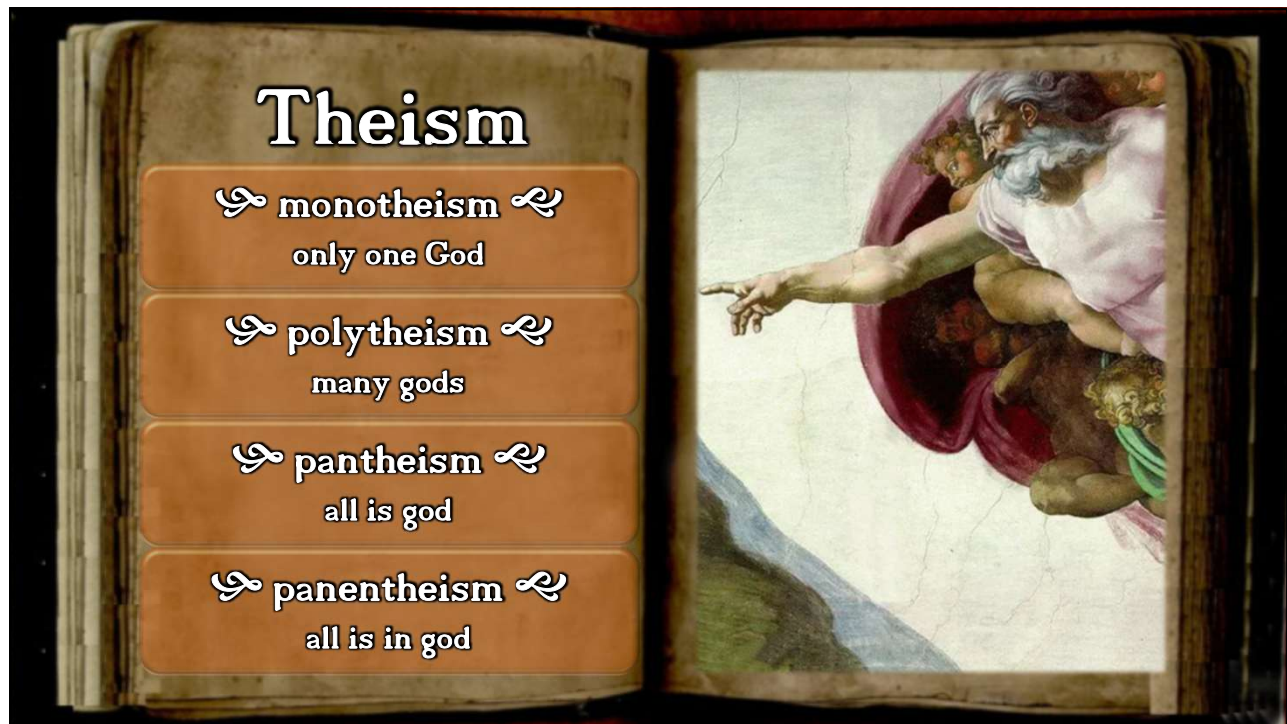
***understood by the things that are made, even  
His eternal power and Godhead ...***

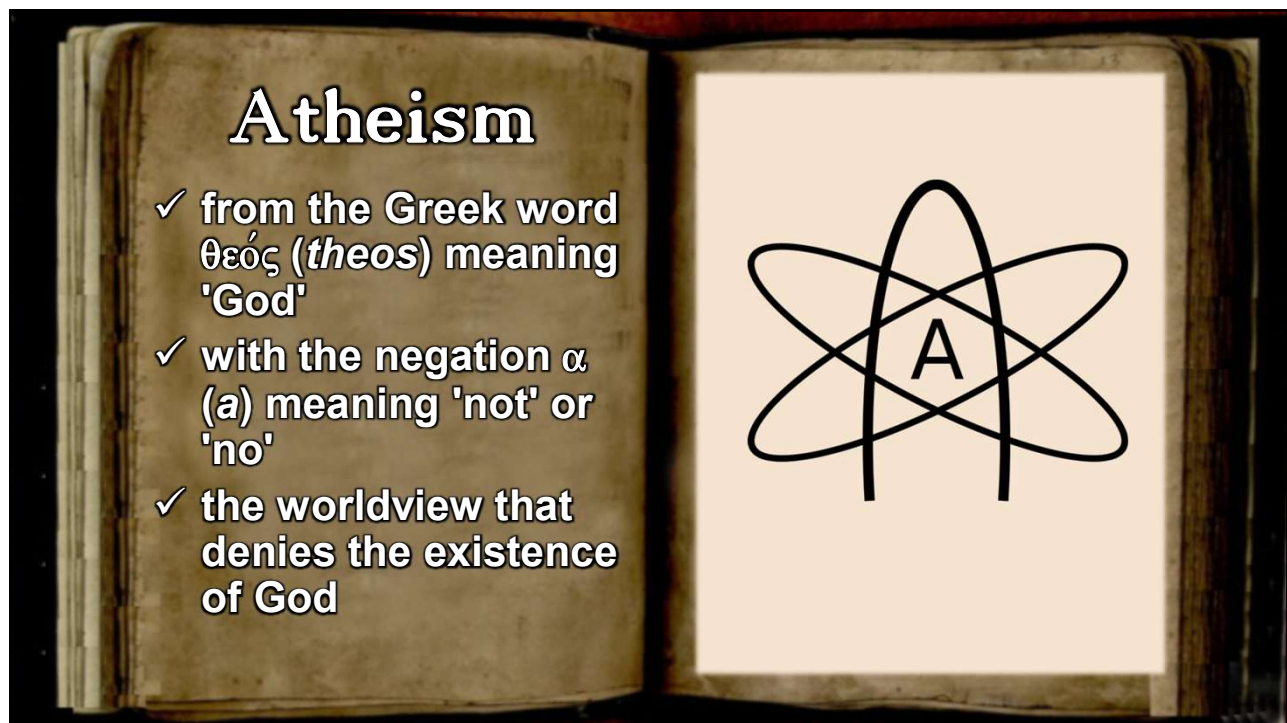
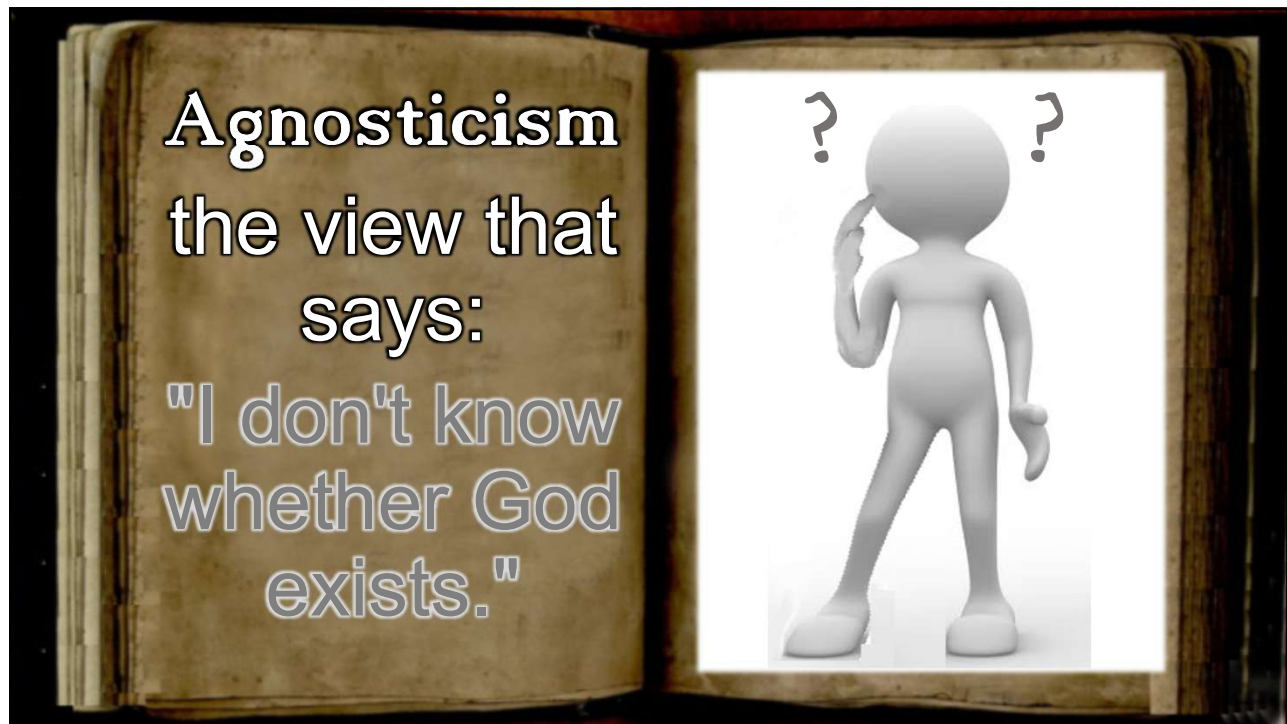
Rom. 1:20a

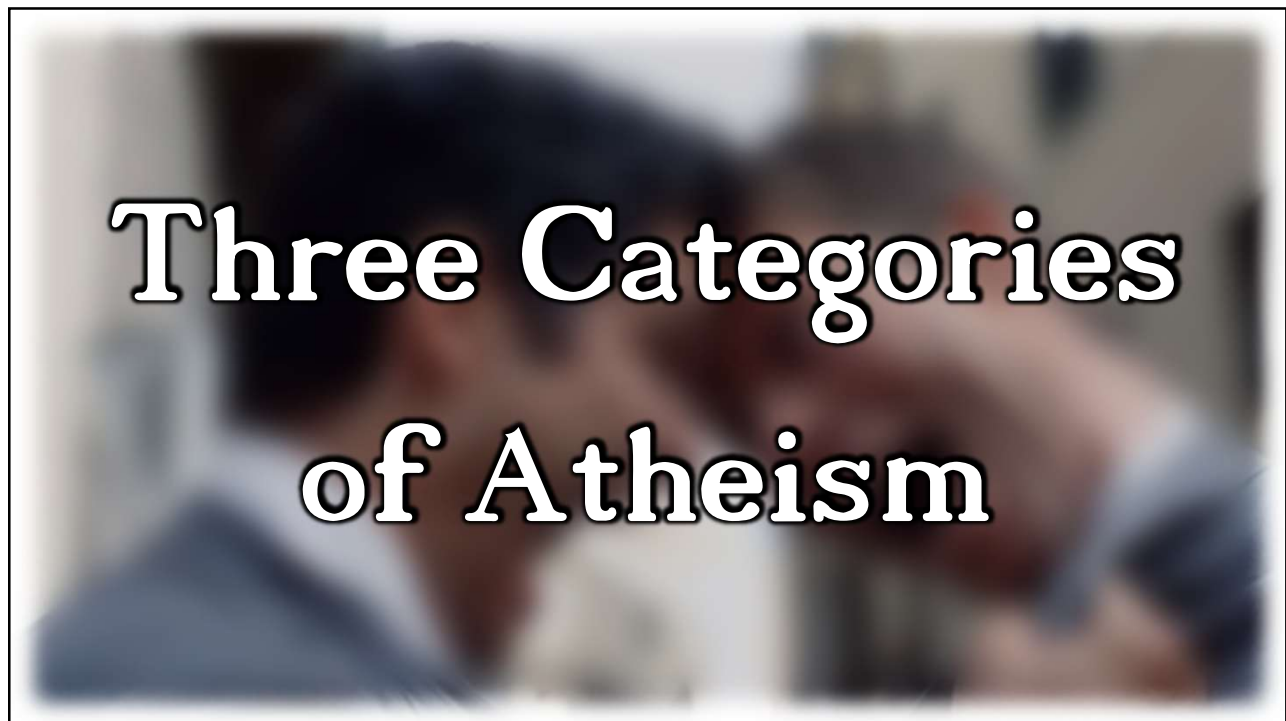
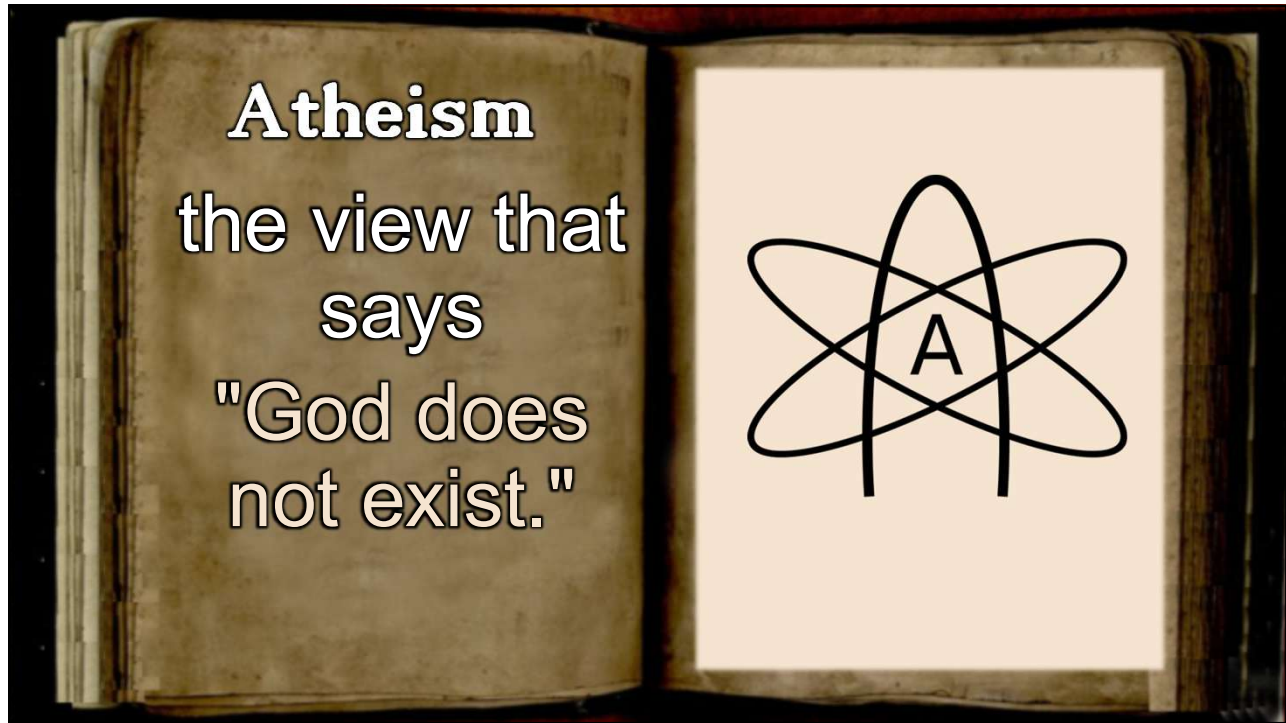


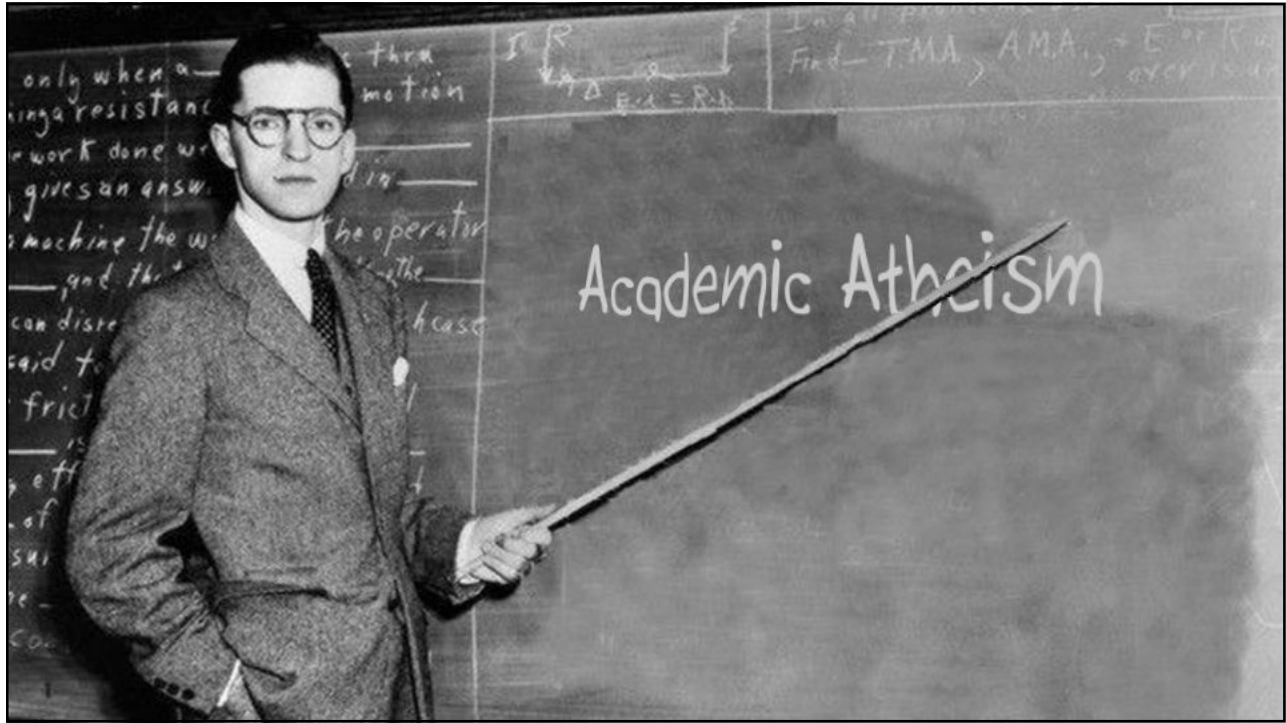












# *Popular Atheism*



# *What Is Popular Atheism?*



*The term 'popular' here does not mean that it is well liked or well known.*



*Rather, in this context, 'popular' is in contrast to 'scholarly.'*



*It means that the writing is for a more general audience instead of the experts or technicians in the field.*



*As such, it requires of the reader less background knowledge and is generally free of technical terminology.*

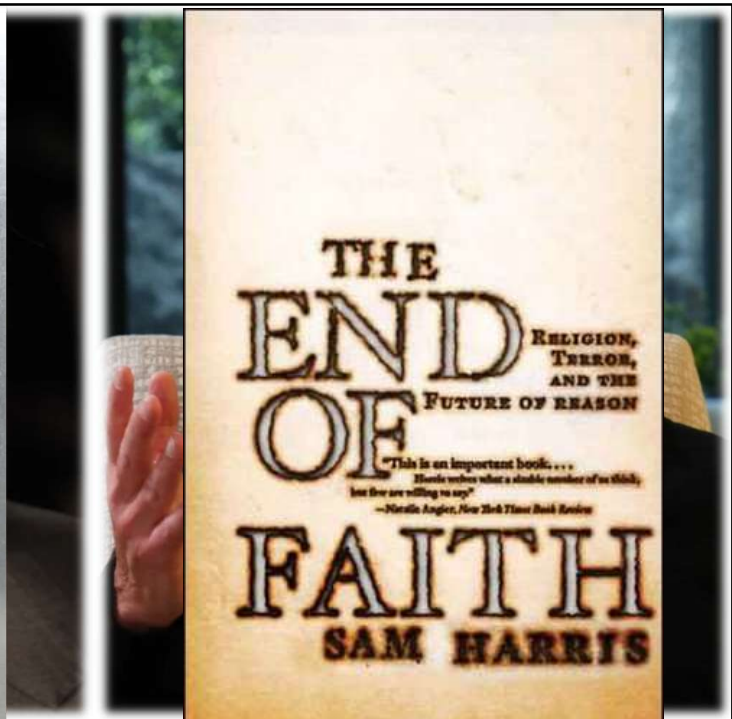
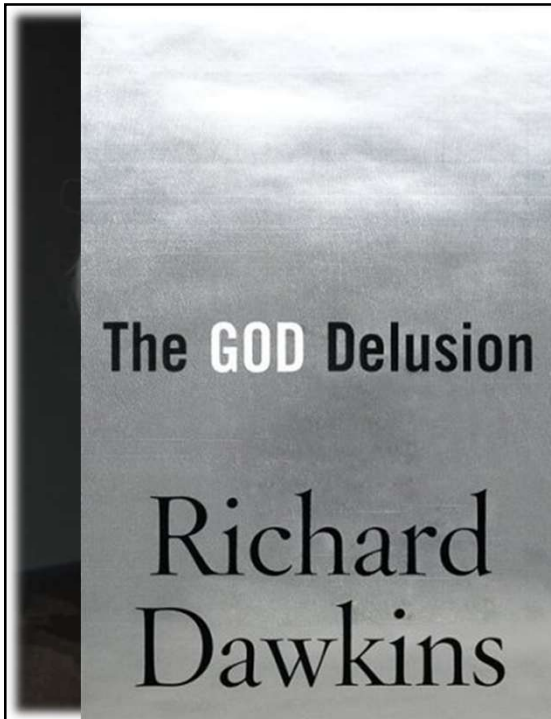
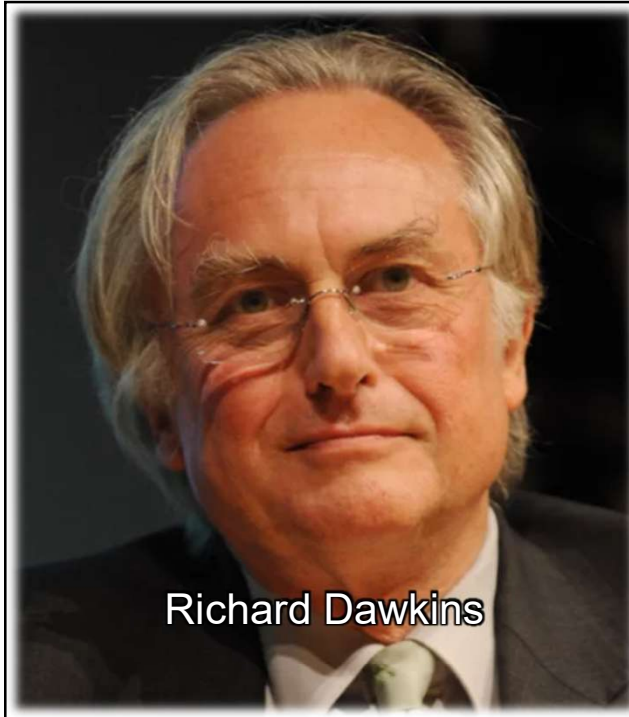


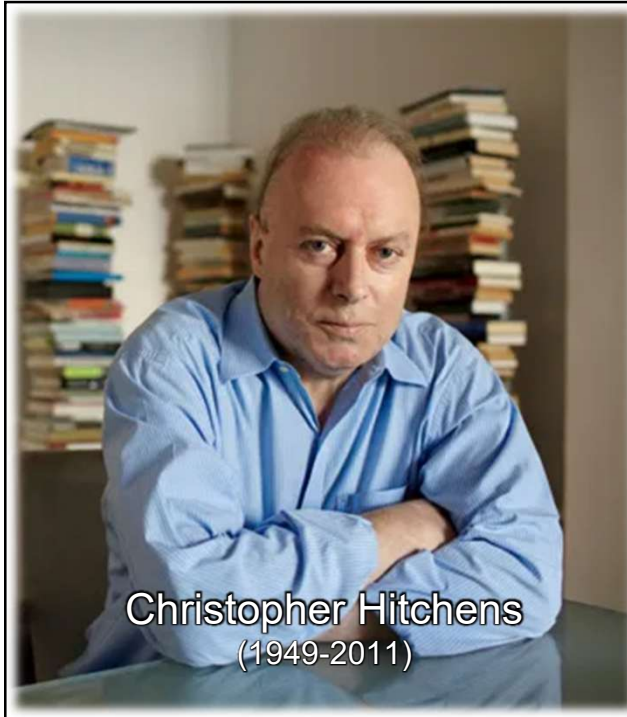
# *Who Are Some Popular Atheists?*



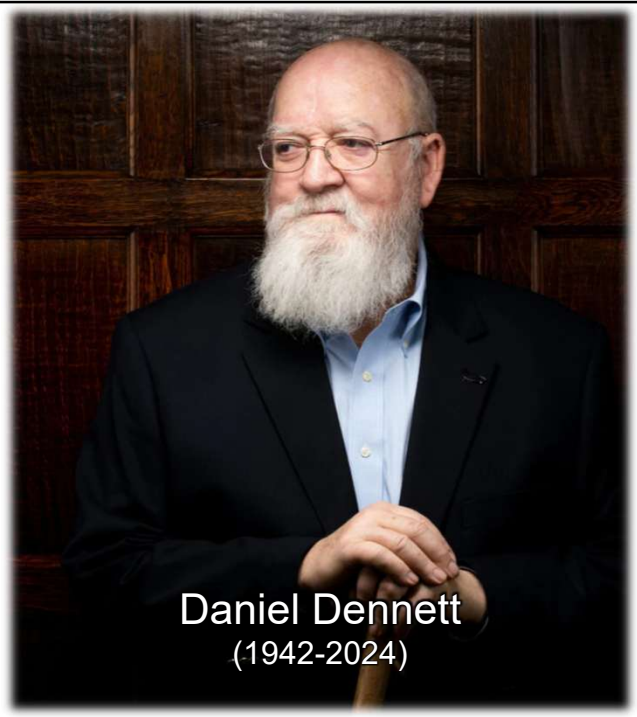
*For reasons that should become obvious, the cast of Popular Atheists will include the New Atheists.*



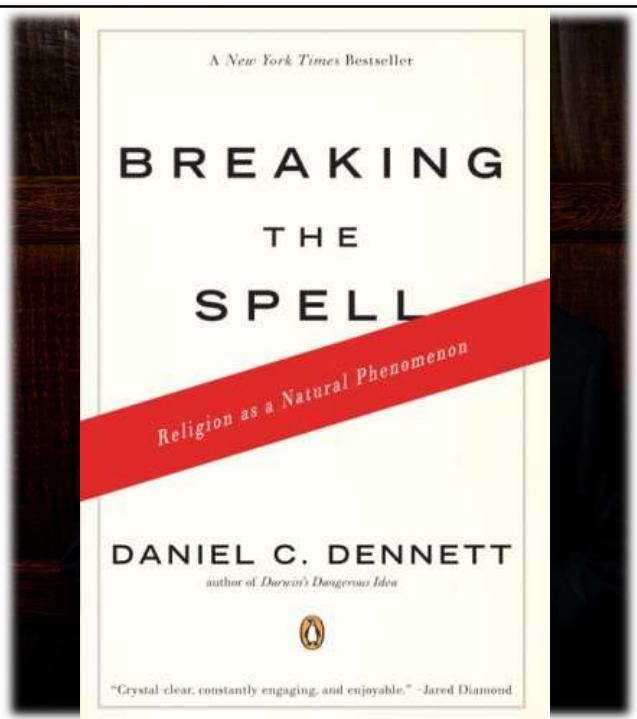
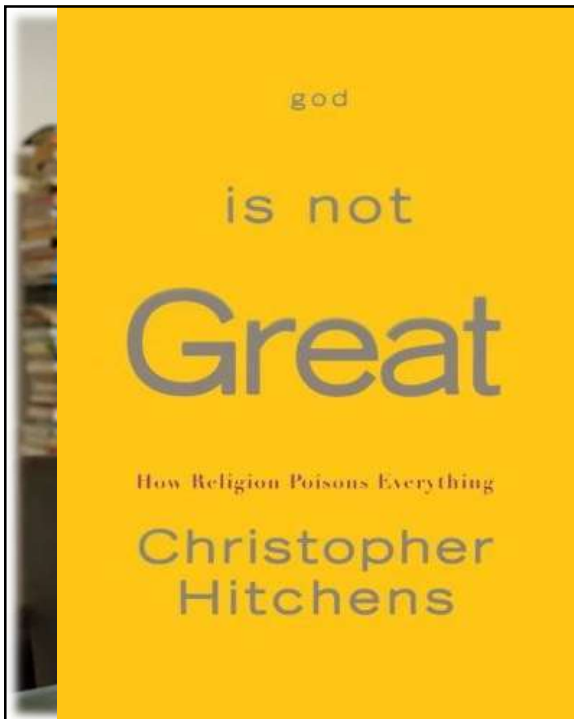


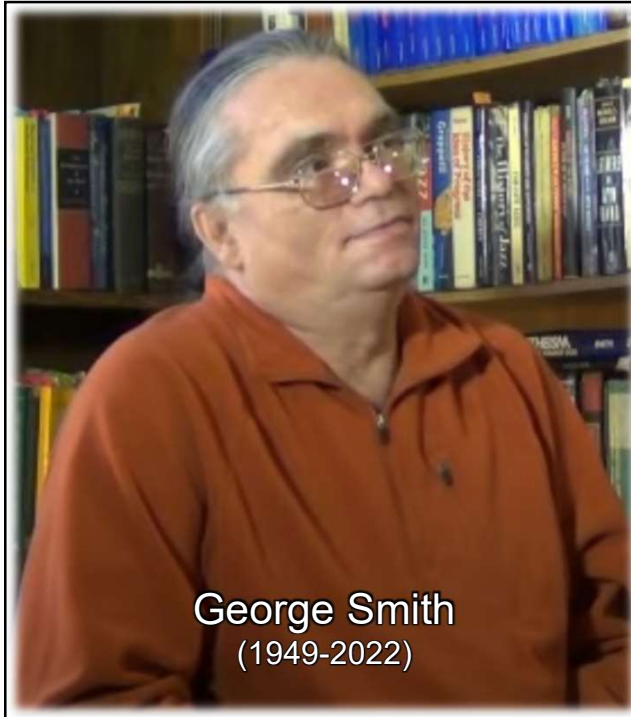


Christopher Hitchens  
(1949-2011)

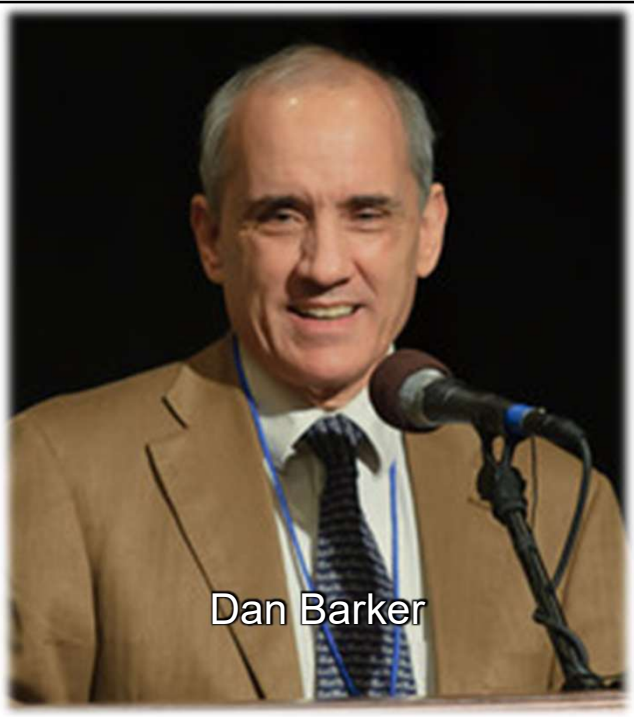


Daniel Dennett  
(1942-2024)

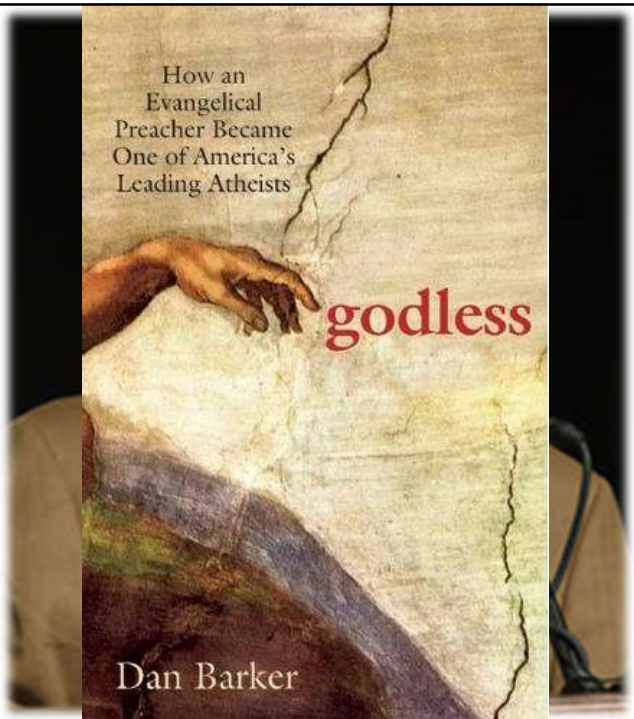
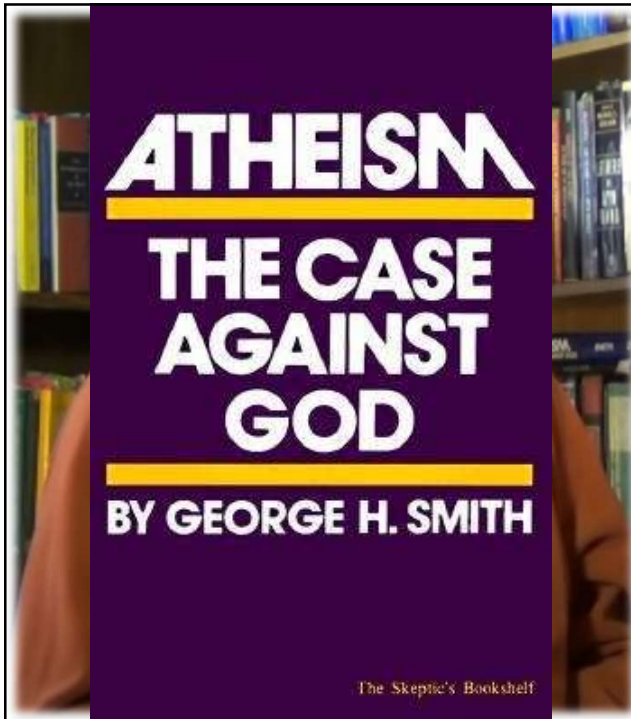


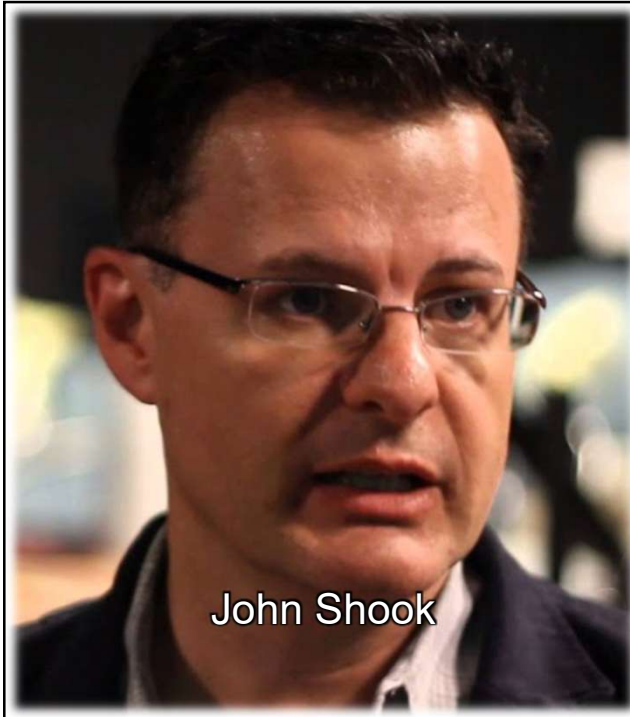


George Smith  
(1949-2022)

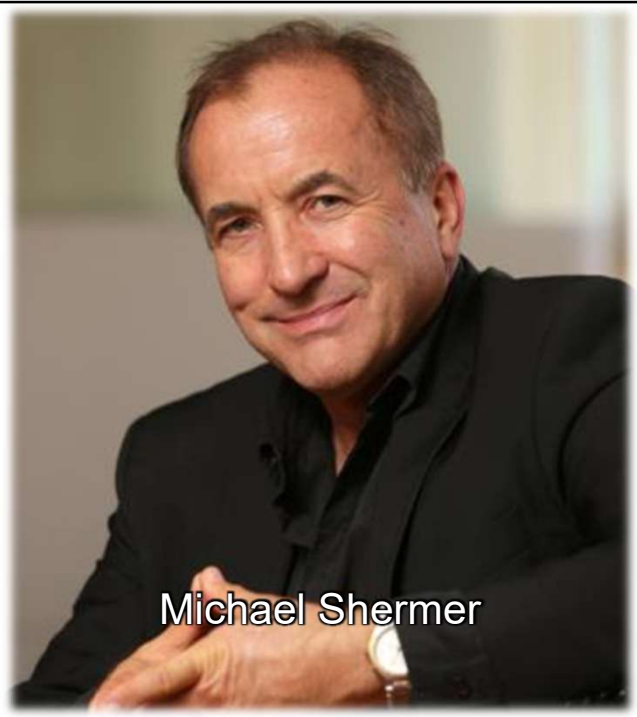


Dan Barker

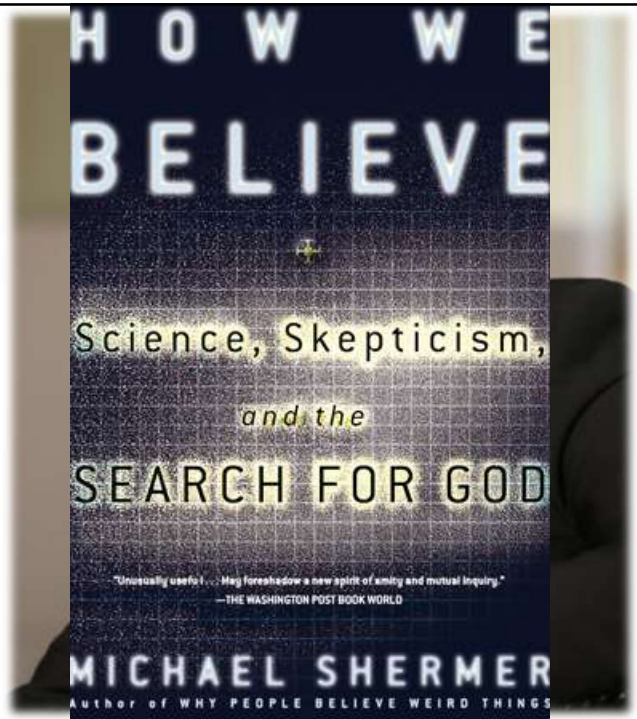
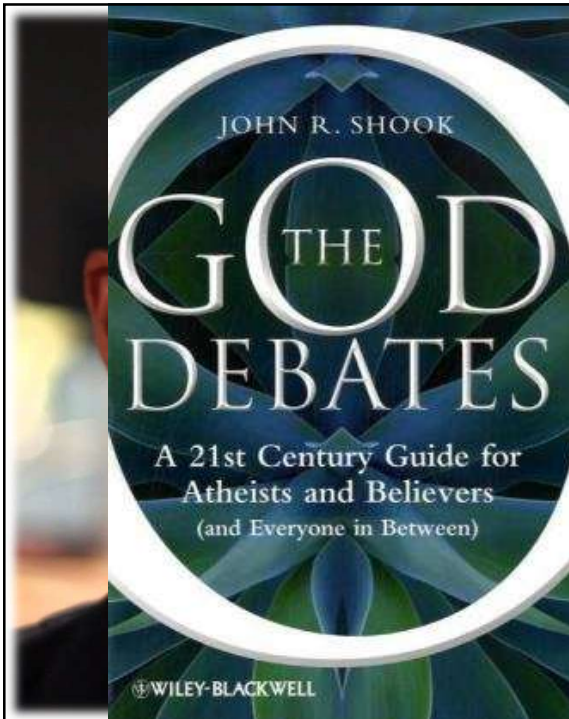




John Shook



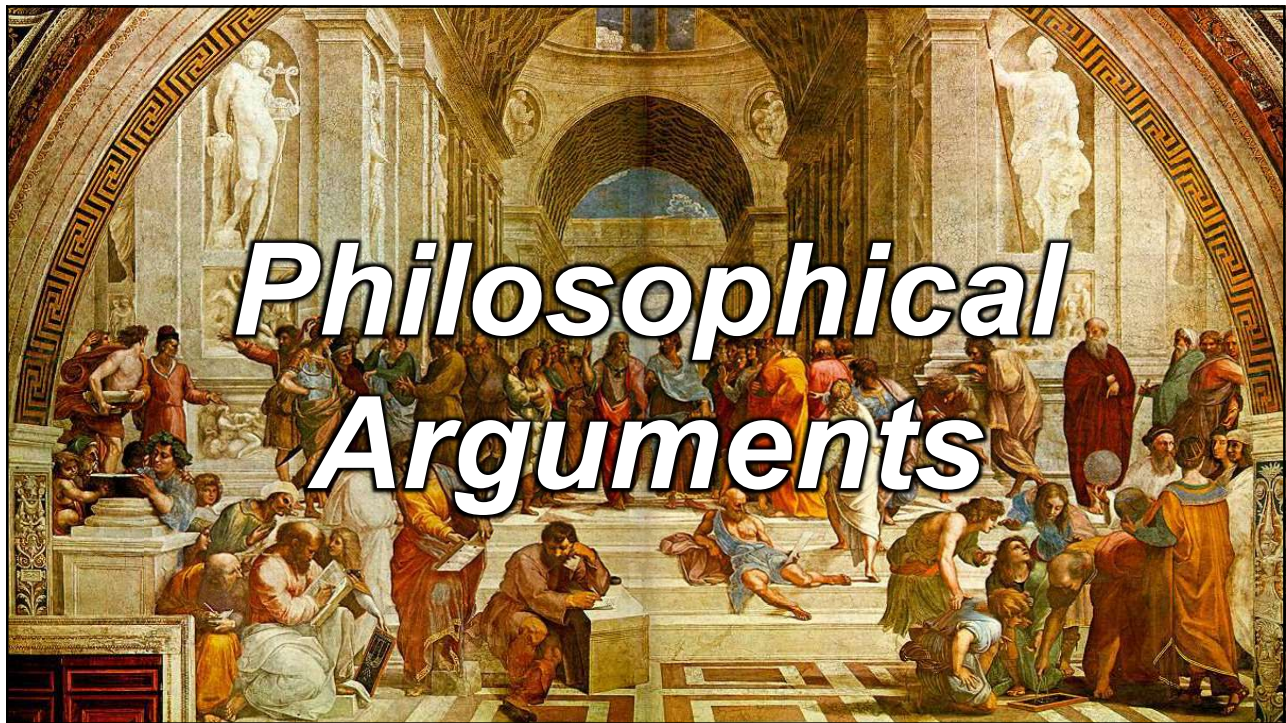
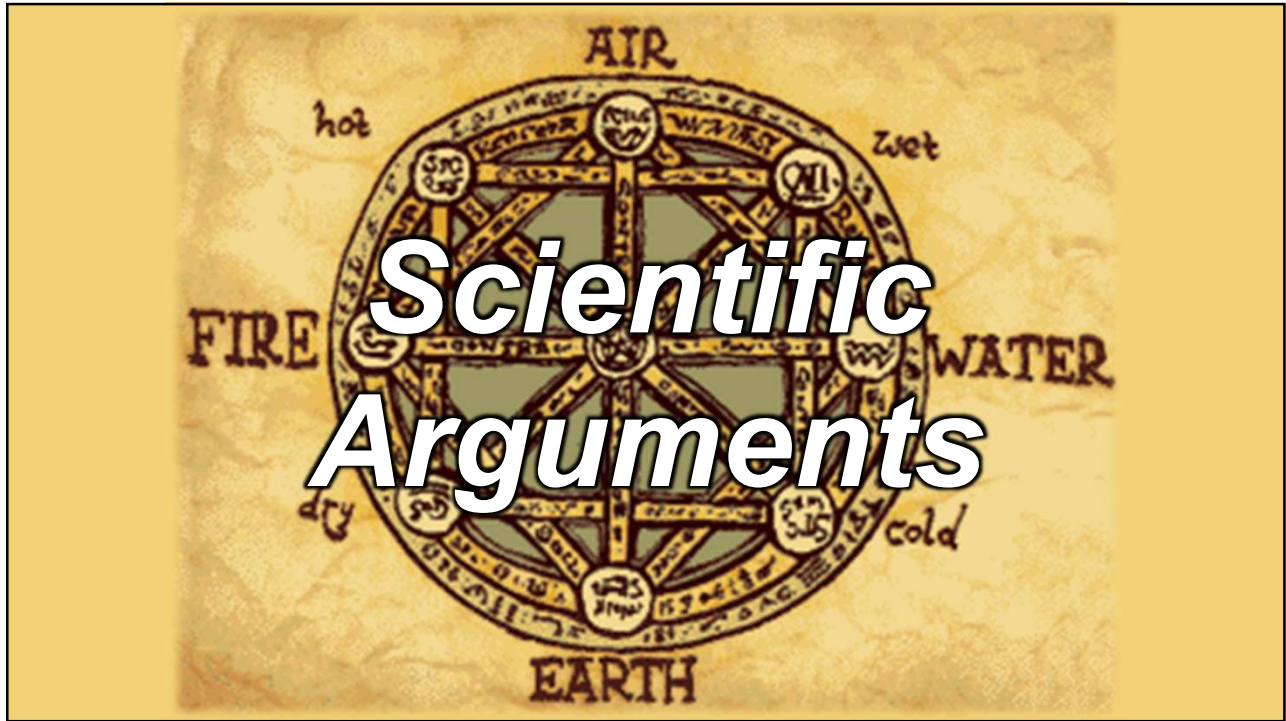
Michael Shermer





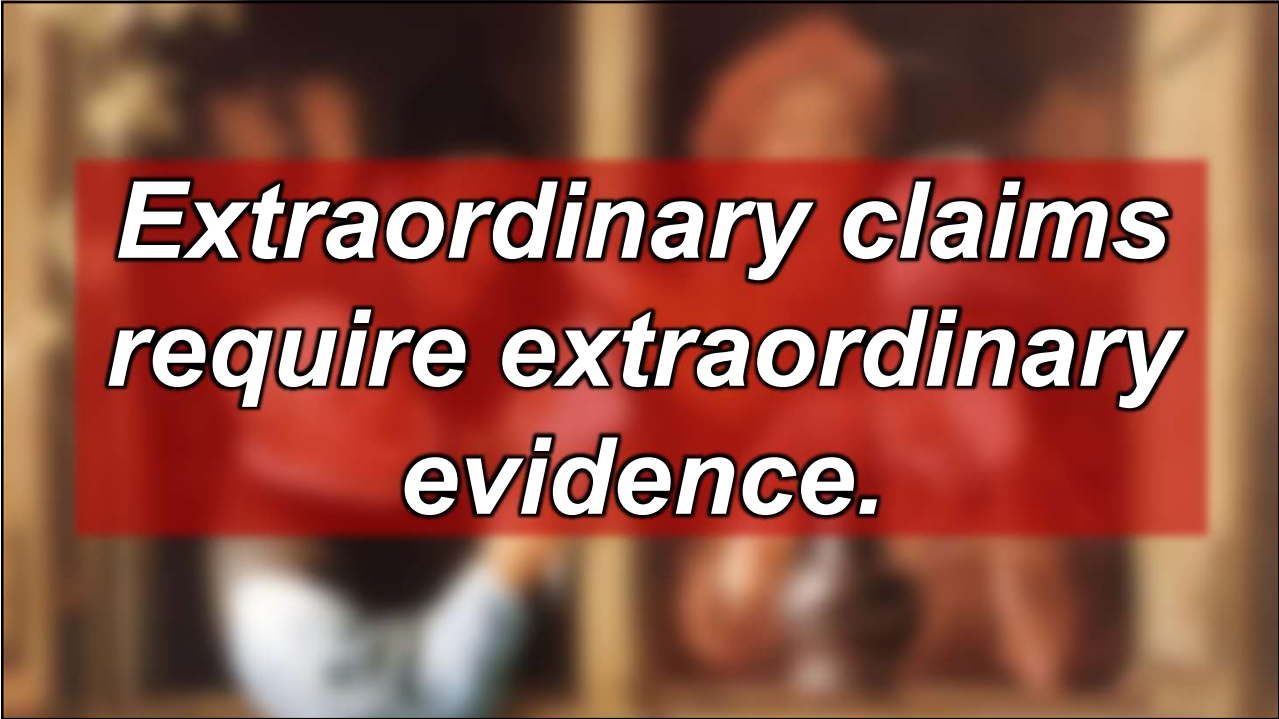
# ***What Are the Arguments of Popular Atheism?***







***Atheism is not a  
belief. Rather, it  
is the lack of a  
belief in God.***



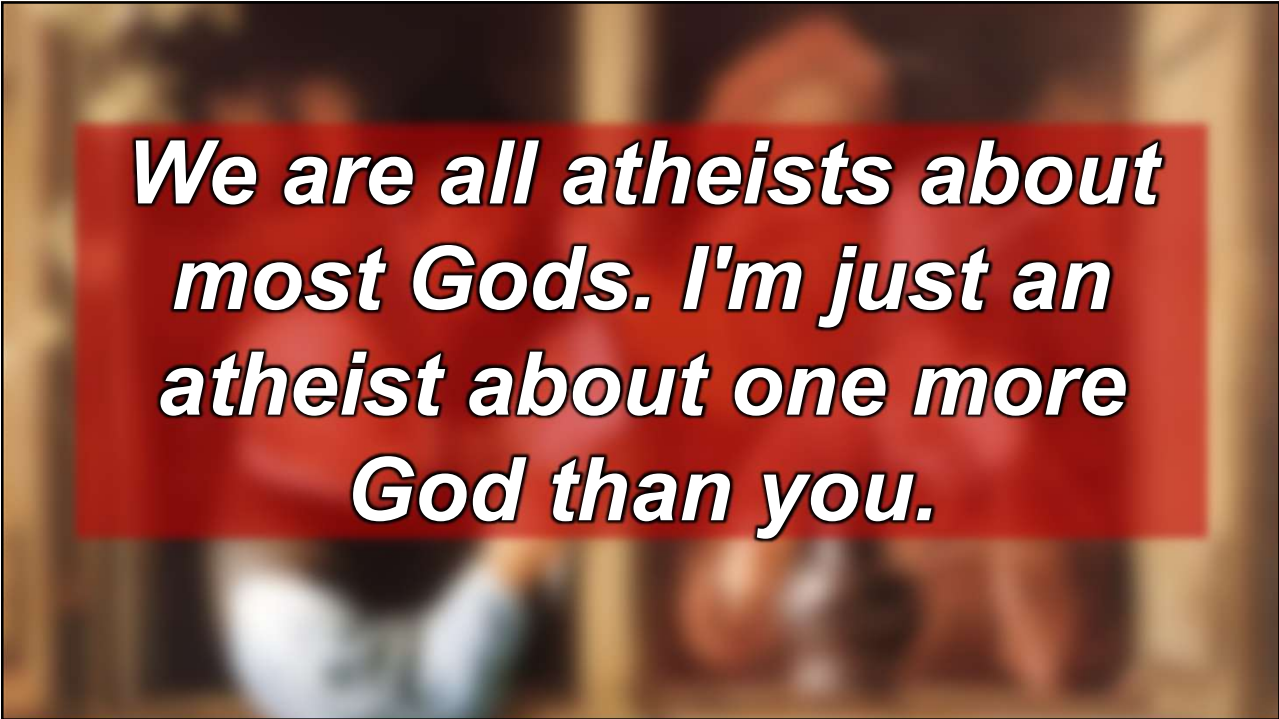
***Extraordinary claims  
require extraordinary  
evidence.***



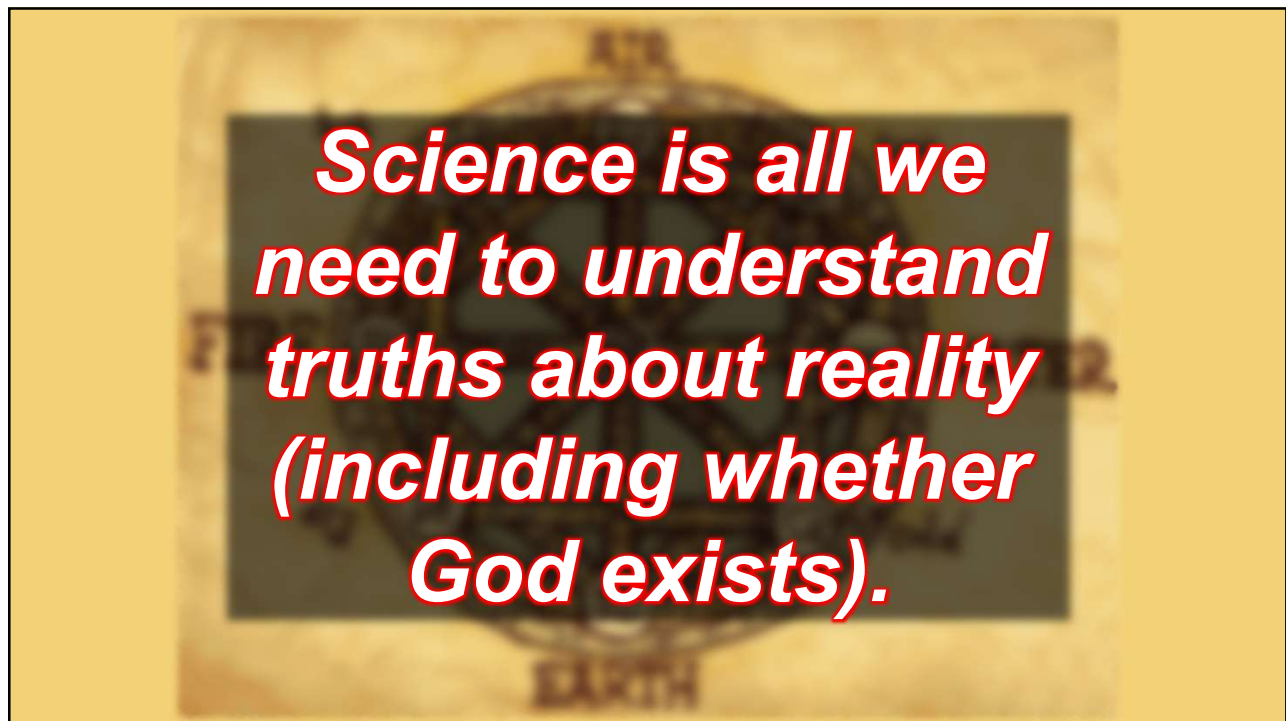
***Science flies you to the  
moon. Religion flies you  
into buildings.***

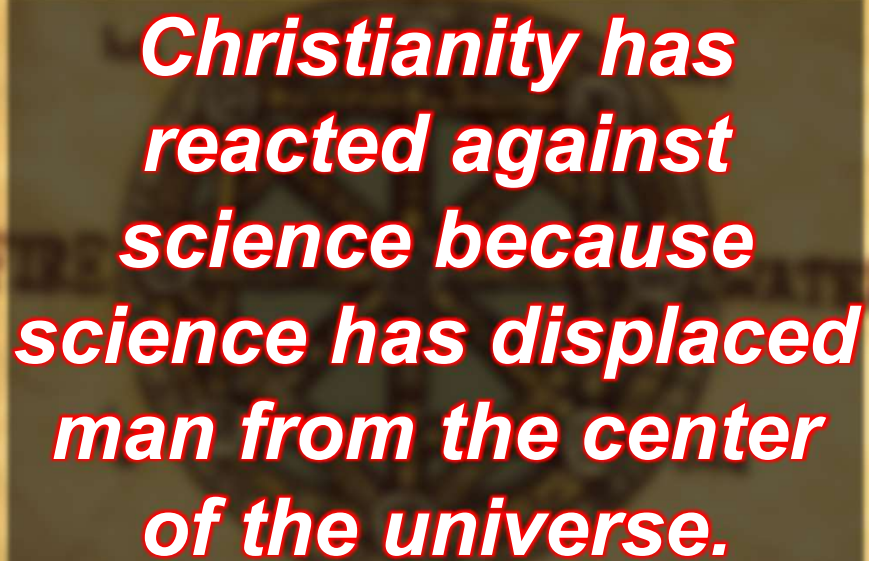


***Axial Tilt: The  
Reason for the  
Season***

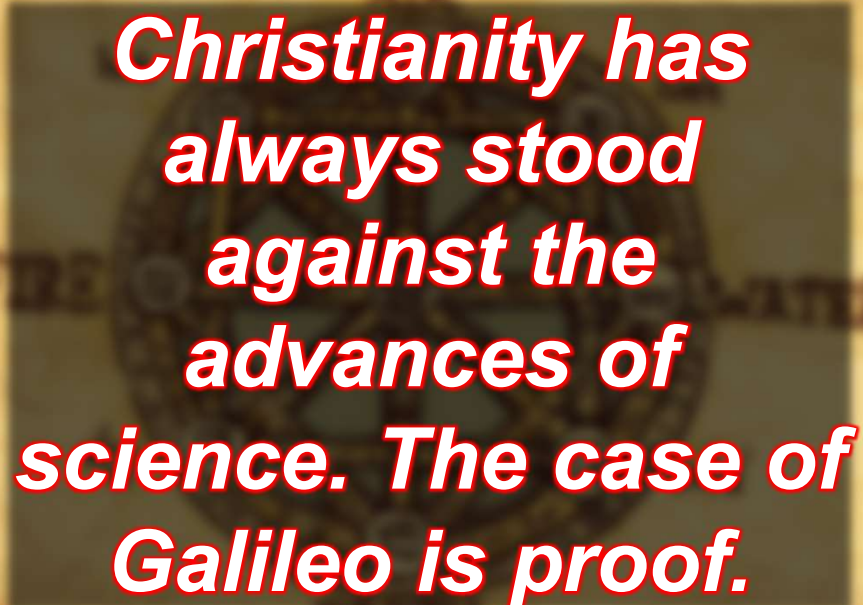


***We are all atheists about  
most Gods. I'm just an  
atheist about one more  
God than you.***

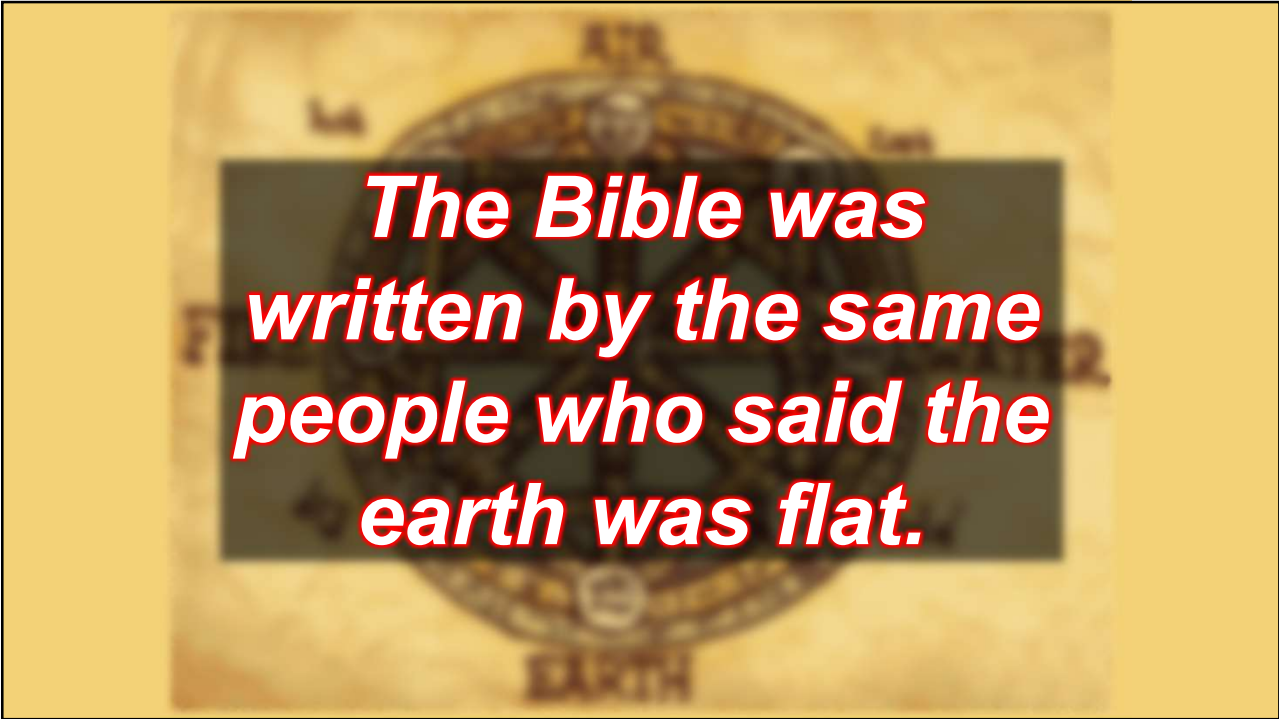




***Christianity has reacted against science because science has displaced man from the center of the universe.***



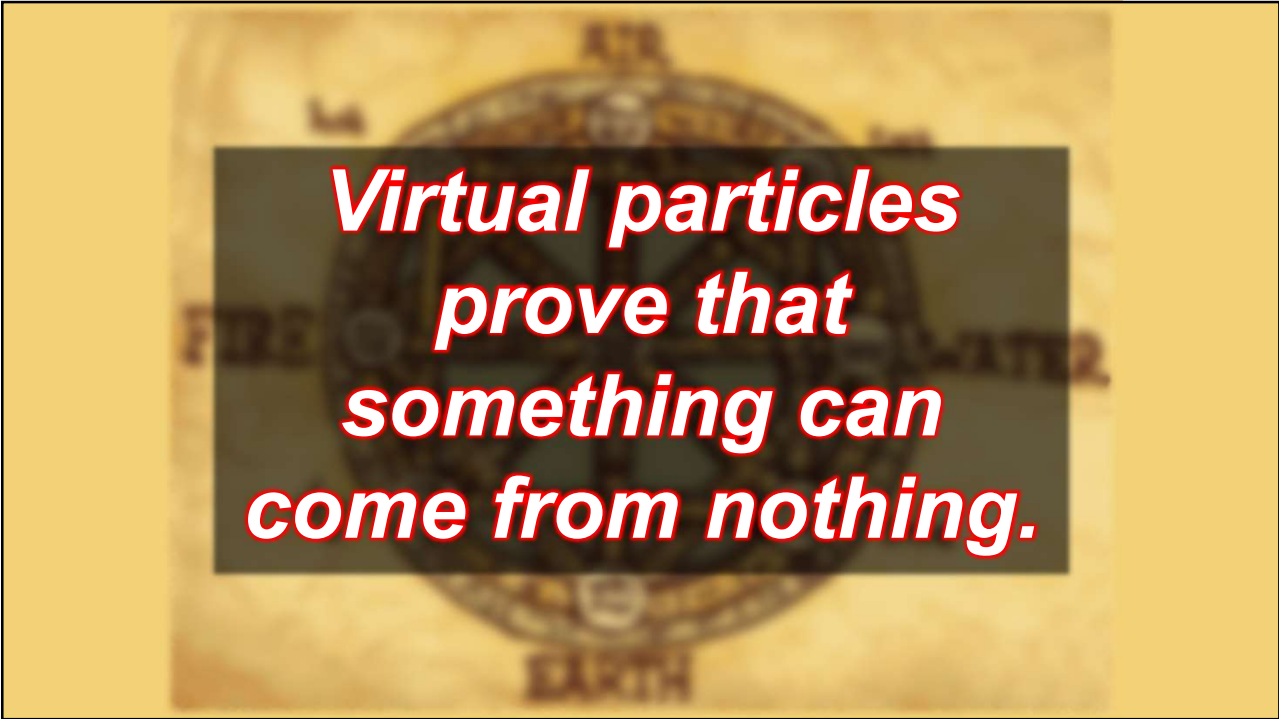
***Christianity has always stood against the advances of science. The case of Galileo is proof.***



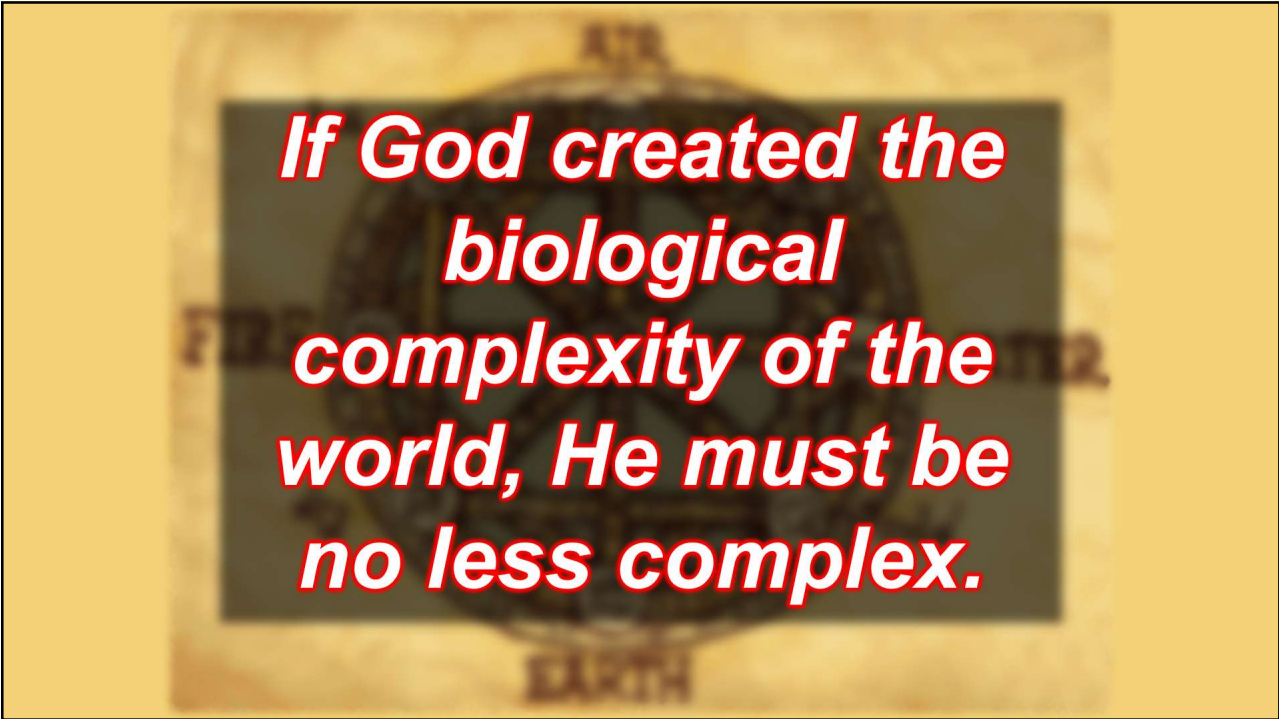
***The Bible was  
written by the same  
people who said the  
earth was flat.***



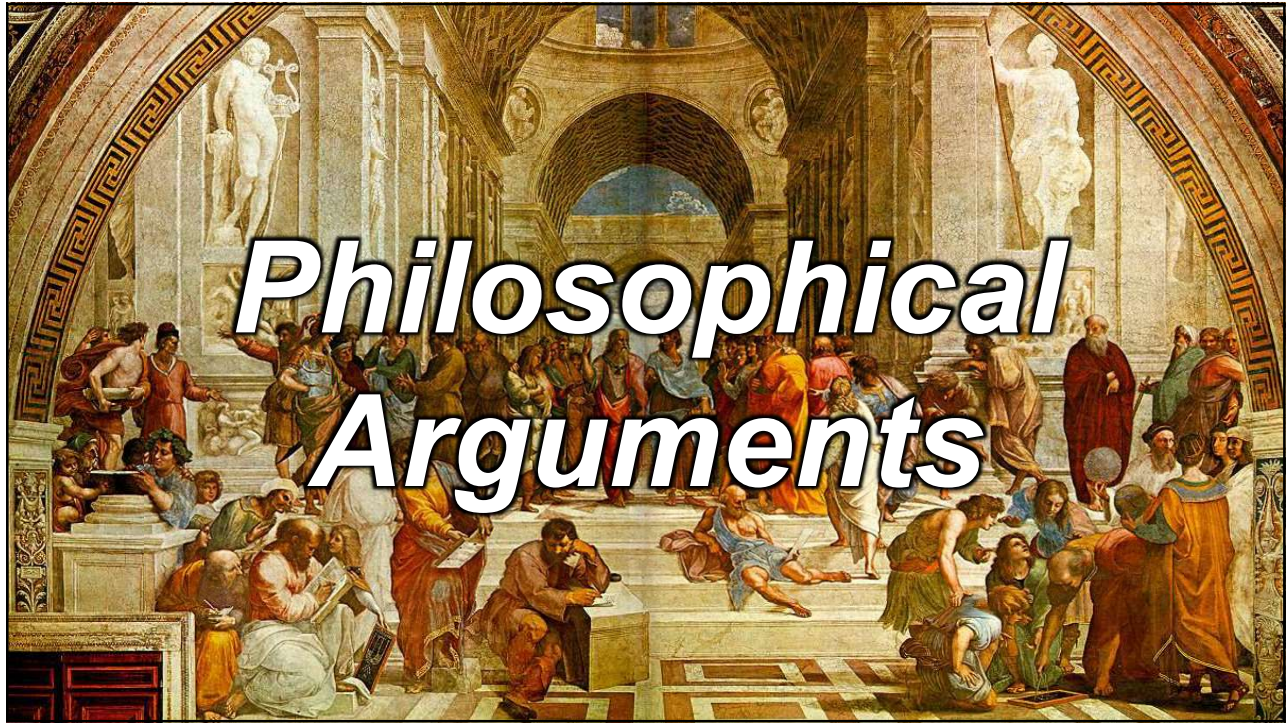
***Most scientists are  
atheists therefore  
the belief in God is  
not scientific.***

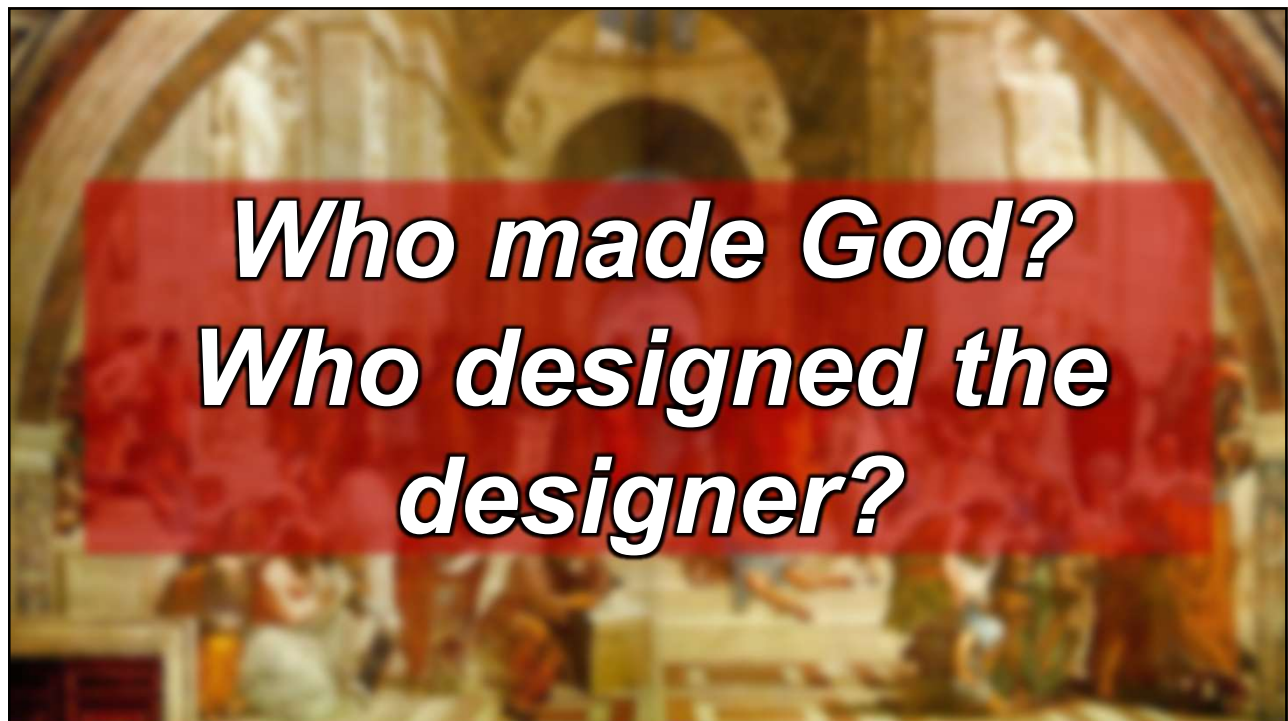
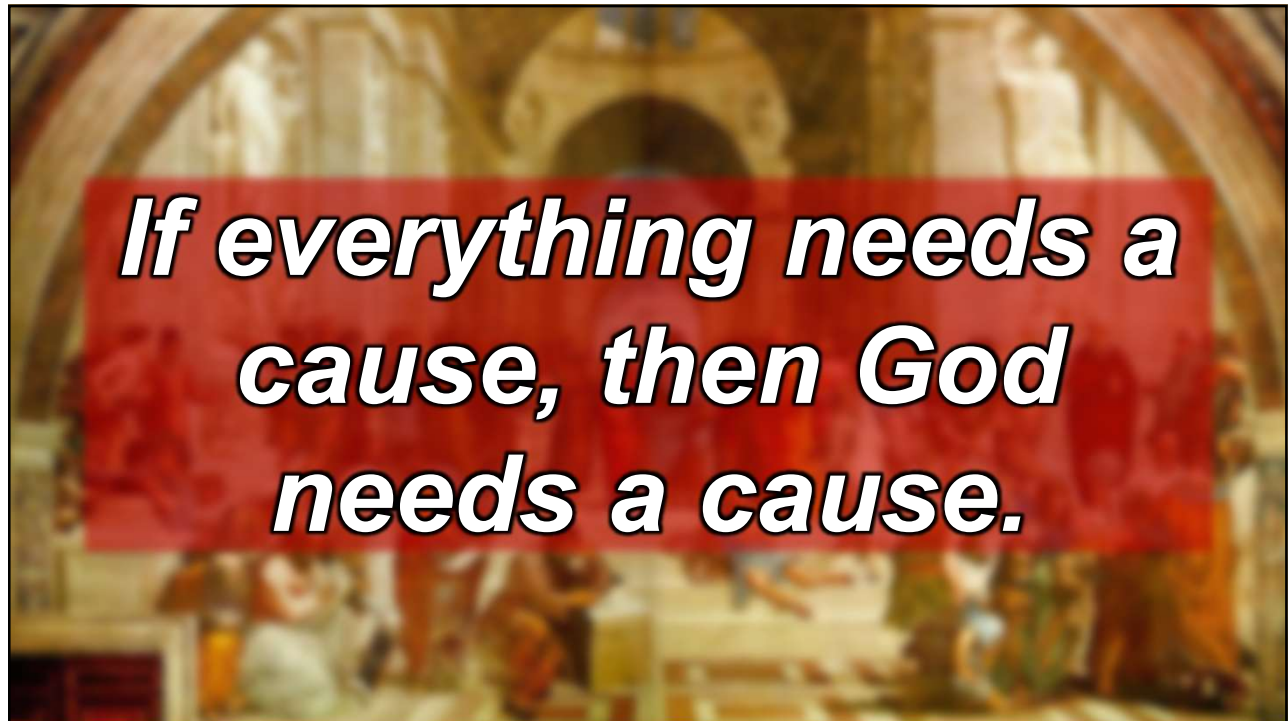


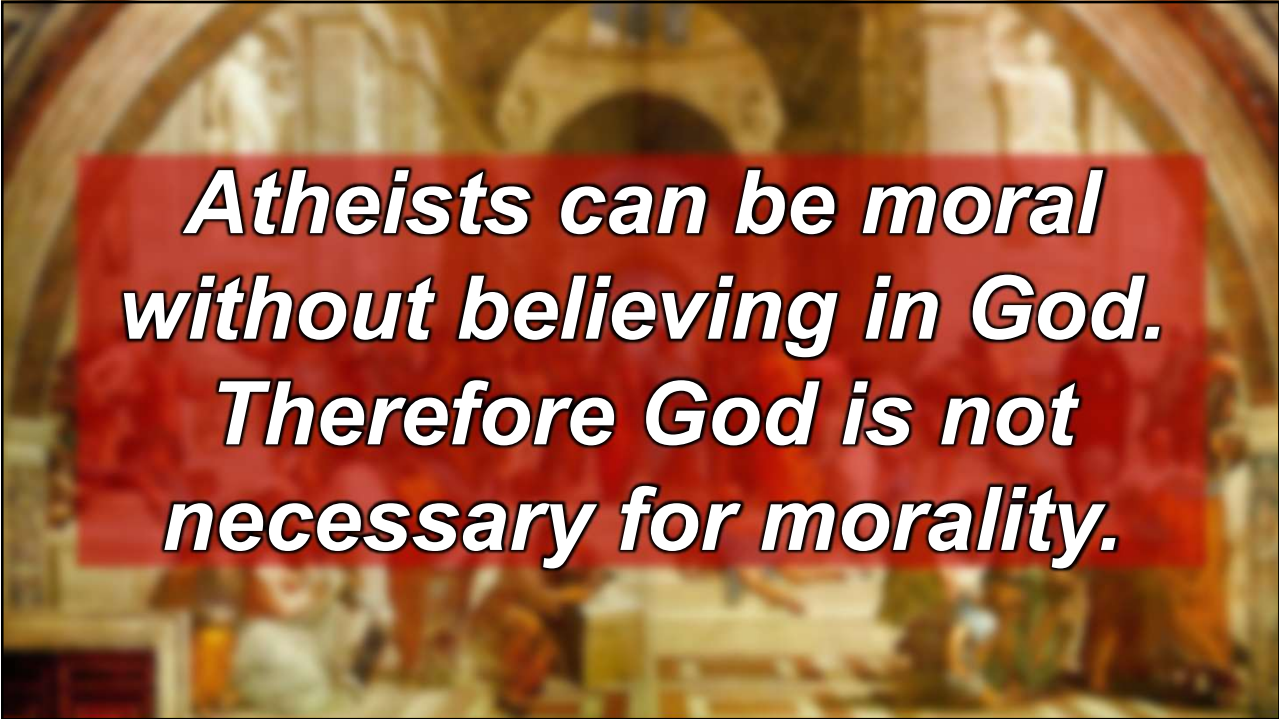
***Virtual particles  
prove that  
something can  
come from nothing.***



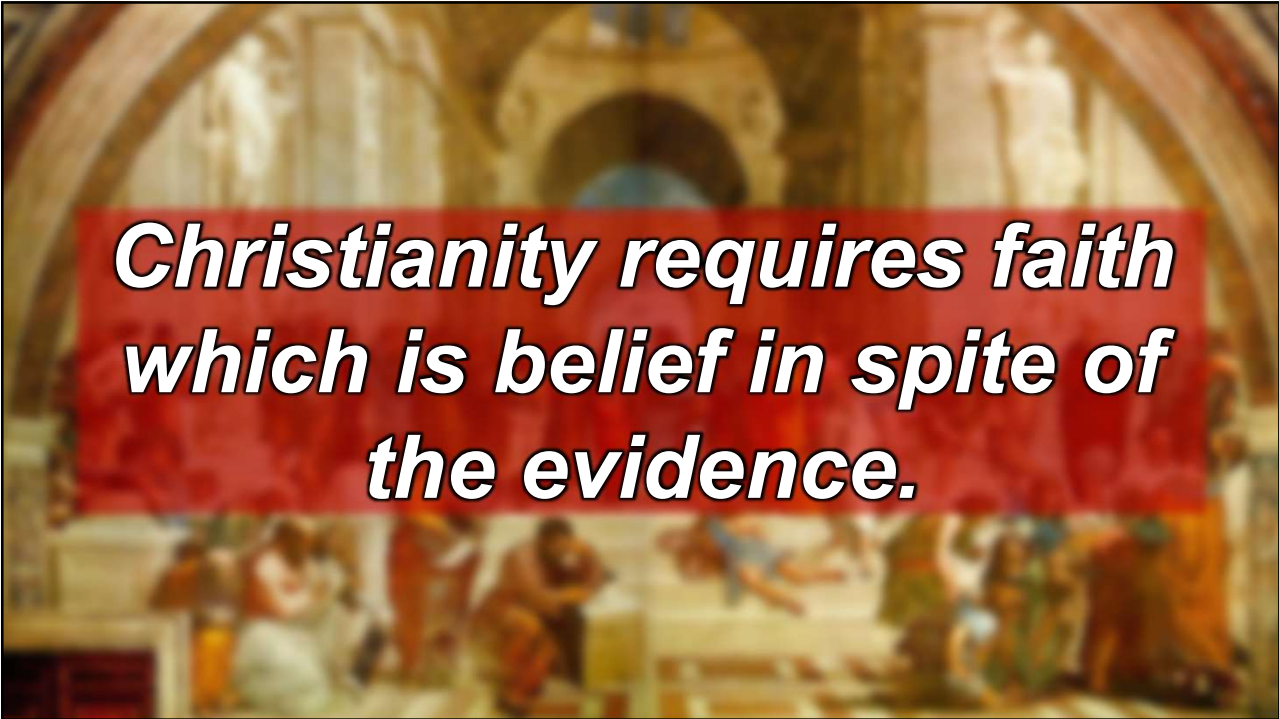
***If God created the  
biological  
complexity of the  
world, He must be  
no less complex.***



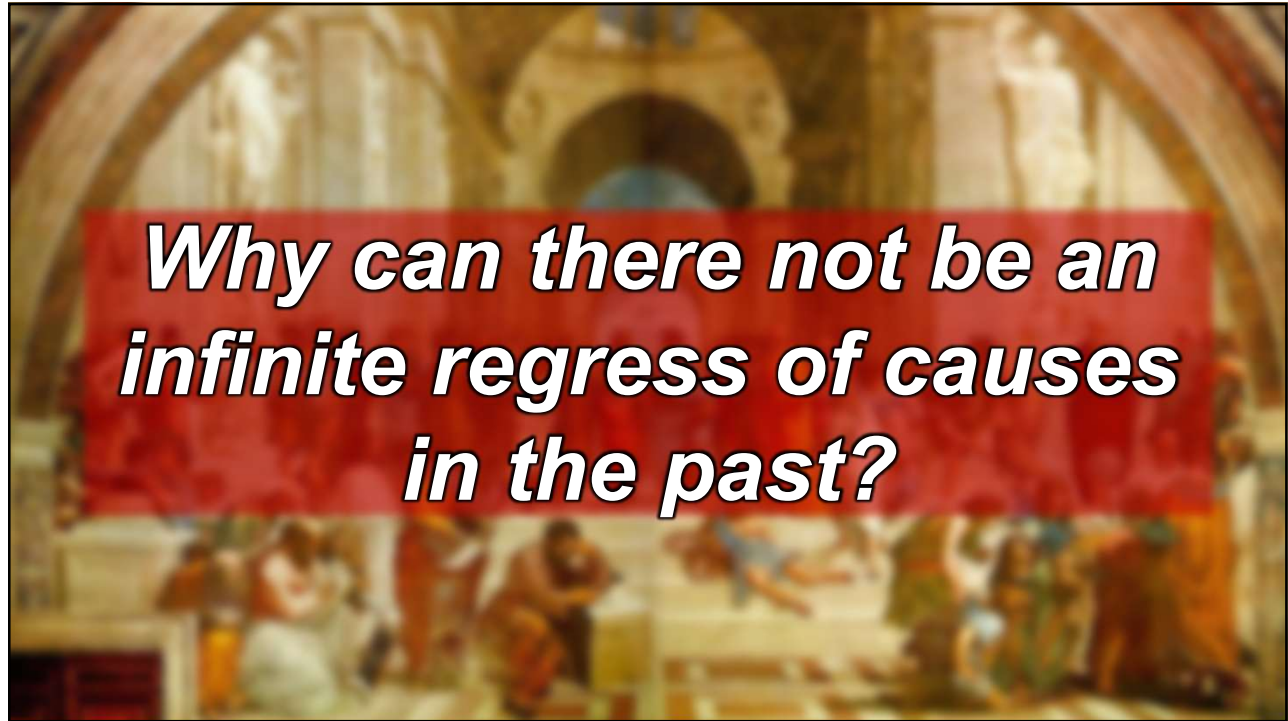




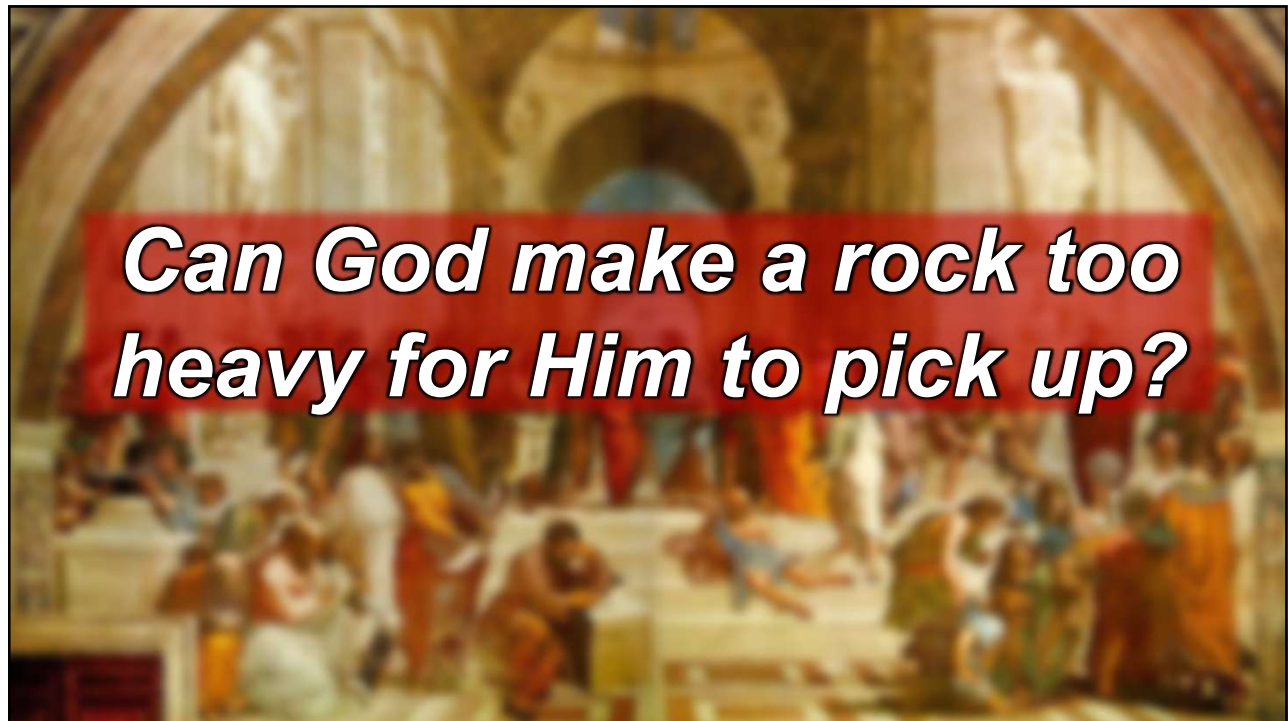
***Atheists can be moral  
without believing in God.  
Therefore God is not  
necessary for morality.***



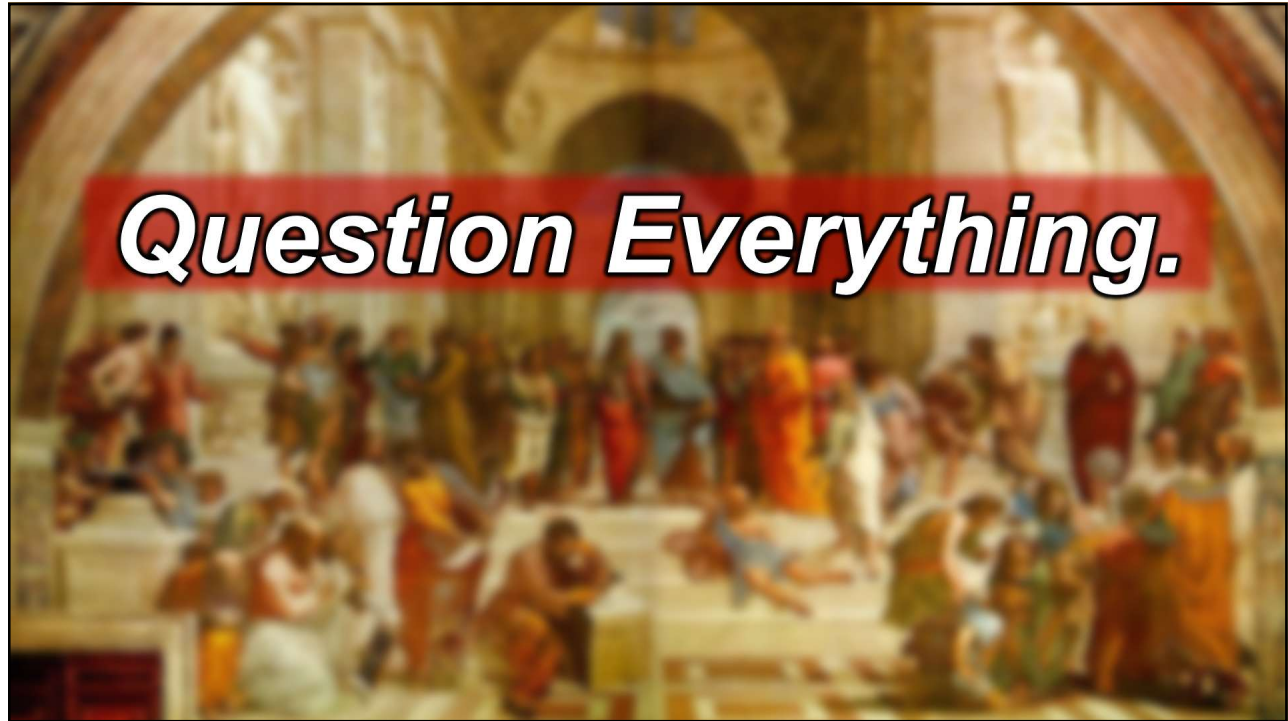
***Christianity requires faith  
which is belief in spite of  
the evidence.***



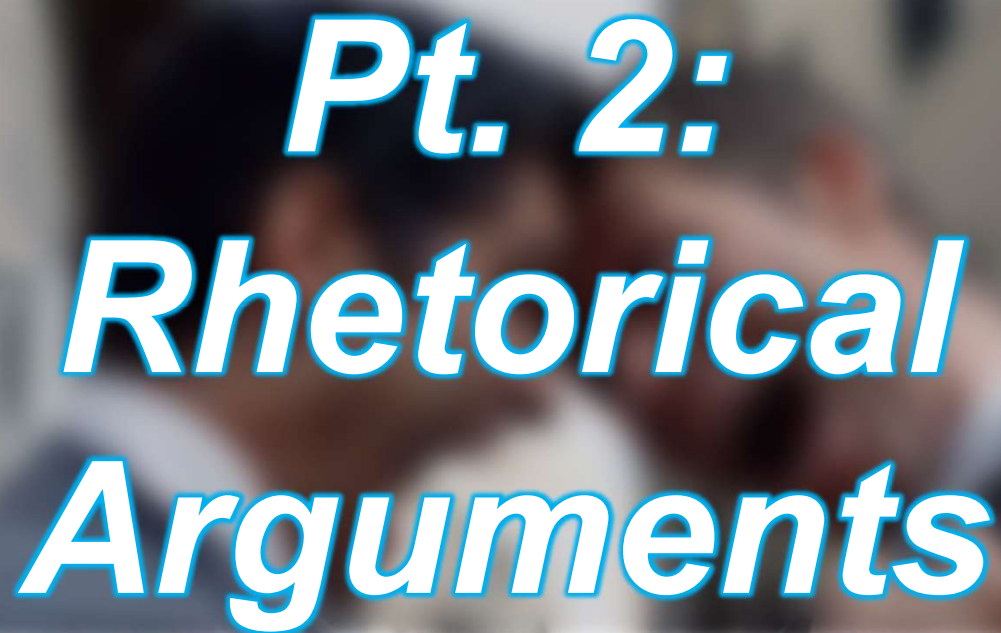
***Why can there not be an  
infinite regress of causes  
in the past?***



***Can God make a rock too  
heavy for Him to pick up?***



|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Question Everything.</b></p>  | <p><b>Why should we think that the cause of the universe is God?</b></p>            | <p><b>Can God make a rock too heavy for Him to pick up?</b></p>  |
| <p><b>Why can there not be an infinite regress of causes in the past?</b></p> | <p><b>Christianity requires faith which is belief in spite of the evidence.</b></p> | <p><b>Atheists can be moral without believing in God. Therefore God is not necessary for morality.</b></p> |
| <p><b>Who made God?<br/>Who designed the designer?</b></p>                    |   | <p><b>If everything needs a cause, then God needs a cause.</b></p>   |



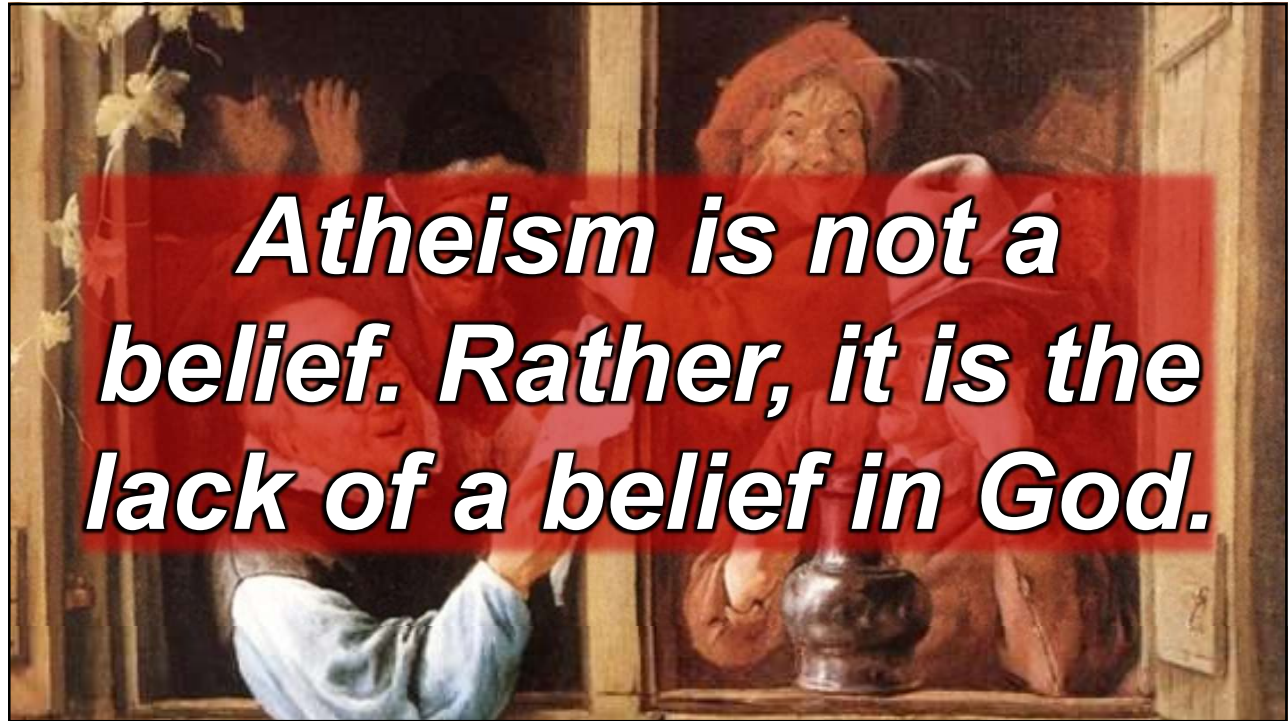
***Pt. 2:  
Rhetorical  
Arguments***



***A Preliminary  
Observation***

***Notice that in some instances, the criticisms from the popular atheists are aimed at an amorphous concept like "religion" instead of the factual question of the existence of God.***



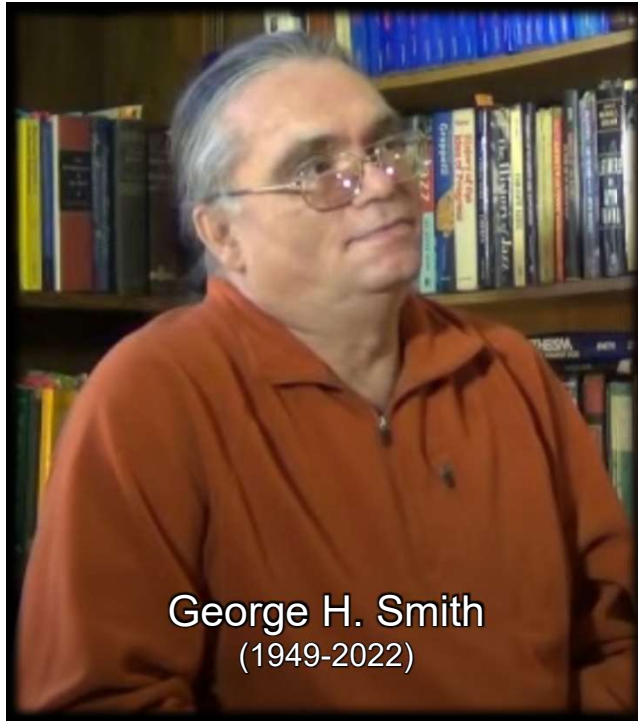


***Atheism is not a belief. Rather, it is the lack of a belief in God.***



**George H. Smith**  
(1949-2022)


**Greg Bahnsen**  
(1948-1995)



**George H. Smith**  
(1949-2022)

***"There is no atheistic worldview. Let's be clear about that. Atheism is simply the absence of belief in God."***

*[Debate between George H. Smith and Greg Bahnsen]*



**George H. Smith**  
(1949-2022)

**ATHEISM**

---

**THE CASE AGAINST GOD**

---

**BY GEORGE H. SMITH**

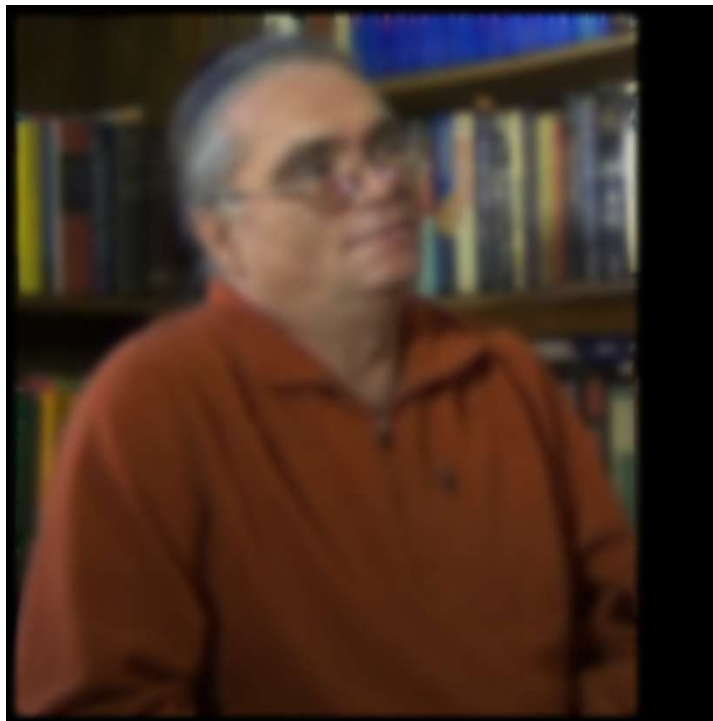
The Skeptic's Bookshelf



George H. Smith  
(1949-2022)

***"Atheism, in its basic form, is not a belief: it is the absence of belief. An atheist is not primarily a person who believes that a god does not exist; rather, he does not believe in the existence of God."***

[George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989), 7]



***"Atheism, in its basic form, is not a belief: **it is the absence of belief.** An atheist is not primarily a person who believes that a god does not exist; rather, he does not believe in the existence of God."***

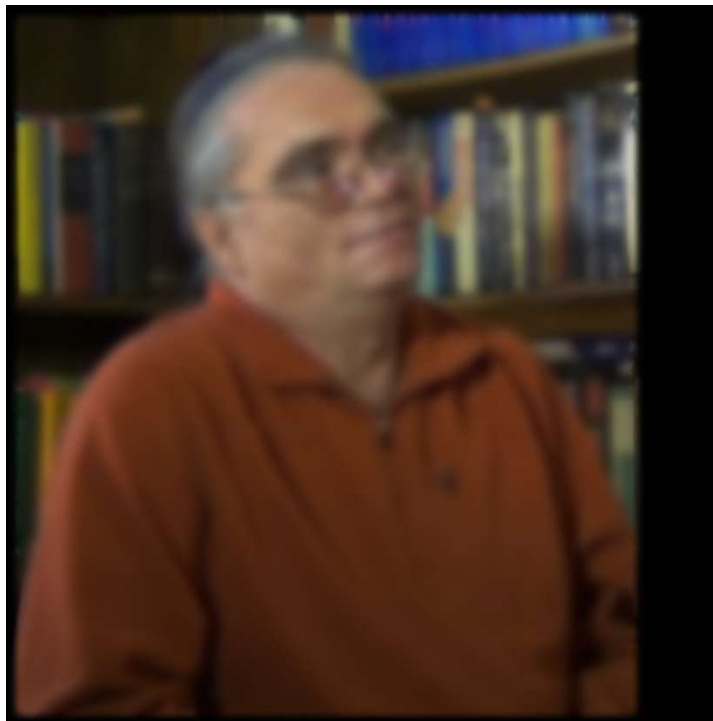
[George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989), 7]



George H. Smith  
(1949-2022)

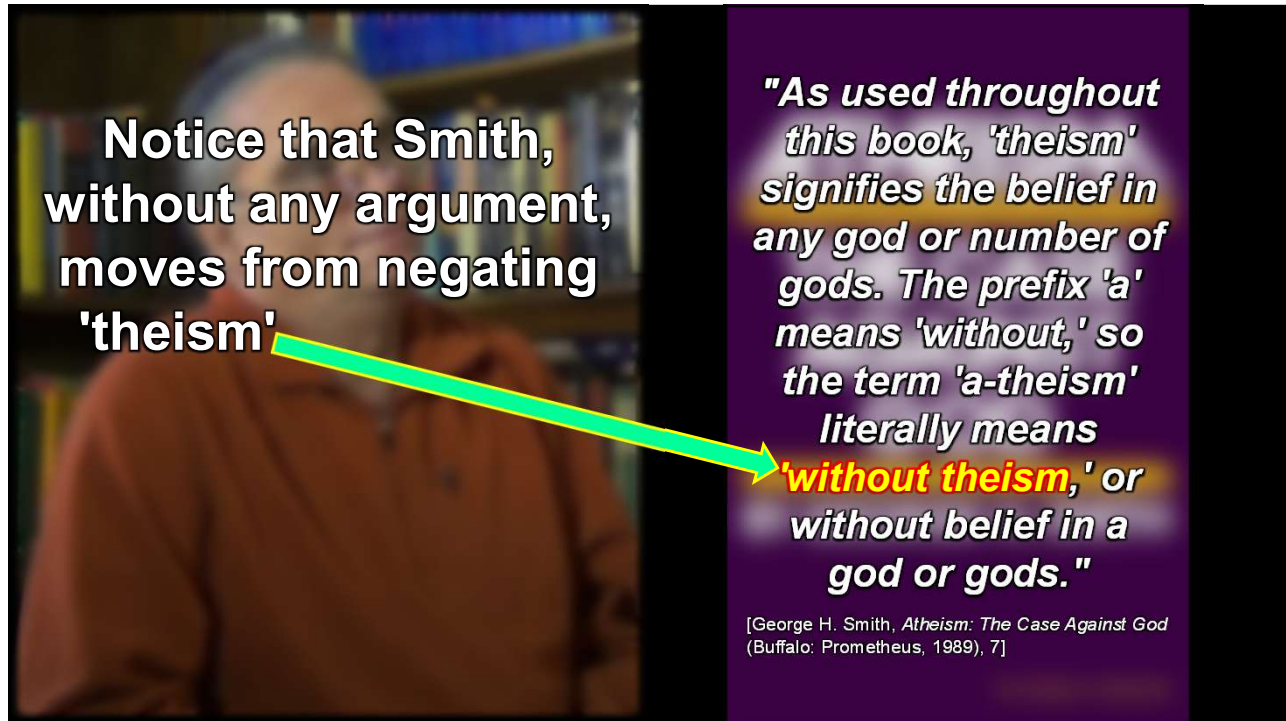
*"As used throughout this book, 'theism' signifies the belief in any god or number of gods. The prefix 'a' means 'without,' so the term 'a-theism' literally means 'without theism,' or without belief in a god or gods."*

[George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989), 7]



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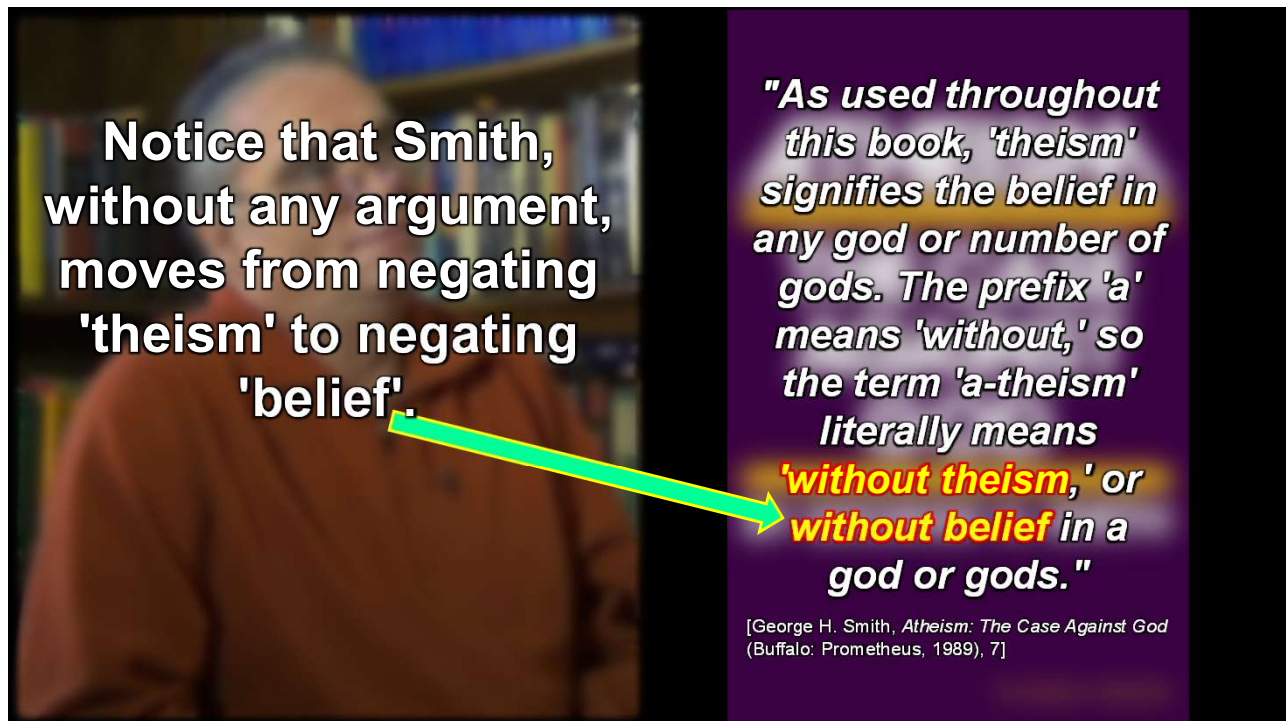
[George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989), 7]



Notice that Smith, without any argument, moves from negating 'theism'

*"As used throughout this book, 'theism' signifies the belief in any god or number of gods. The prefix 'a' means 'without,' so the term 'a-theism' literally means 'without theism,' or without belief in a god or gods."*

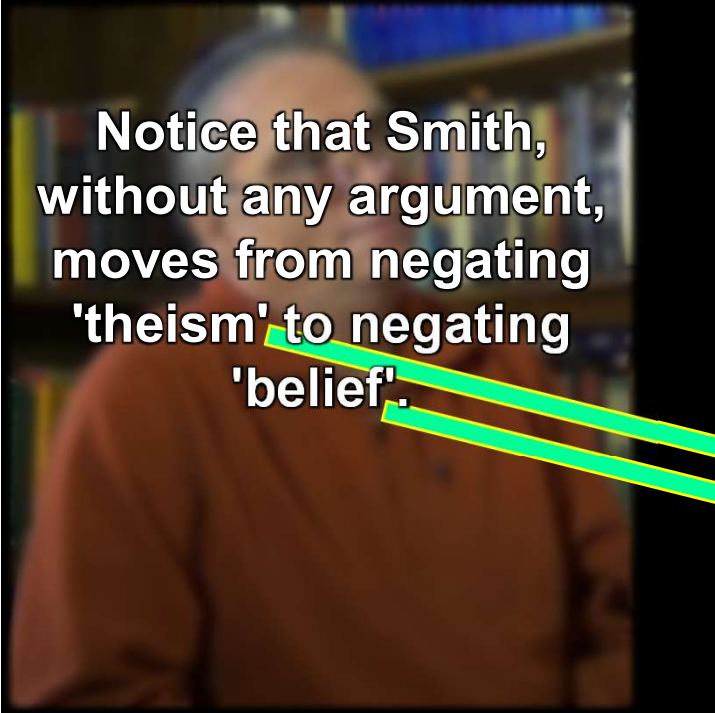
[George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989), 7]



Notice that Smith, without any argument, moves from negating 'theism' to negating 'belief'.

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Notice that Smith, without any argument, moves from negating 'theism' to negating 'belief'.

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[George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989), 7]



*"From the mere fact that a person is an atheist, one cannot infer that this person subscribes to any particular positive belief"*

[George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989), 21]

George H. Smith  
(1949-2022)

***"From the mere fact that a person is an atheist, one cannot infer that this person subscribes to any particular positive belief"***

[Smith, *Atheism*, 21, cf. p. 27]

***"If atheism is correct,***

- *man is alone*
- *there is no god*
- *for knowledge, man must think for himself*
- *for success, man must work*
- *for happiness, man must strive to achieve it*
- *all of these are sole responsibility of man*

**DOES  
GOD  
EXIST**

**The Debate between Theists & Atheists**

**J.P. MORELAND AND  
KAI NIELSEN**

*with Contributions by:*

\* Peter Kreeft \* Antony Flew \*

\* William Lane Craig \*

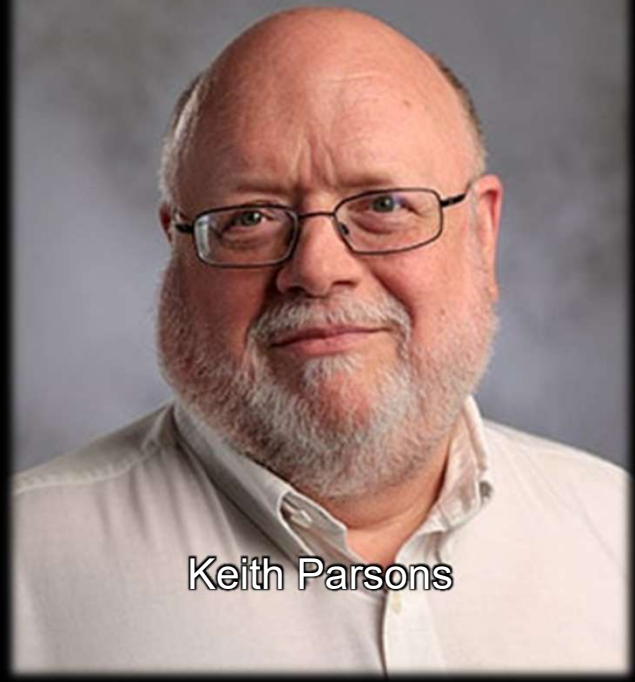
\* Keith Parsons \* Dallas Willard \*



**Keith Parsons**

***"After all, 'atheism' means simply the lack of belief in God (and not, as is commonly supposed, the denial of God's existence)."***

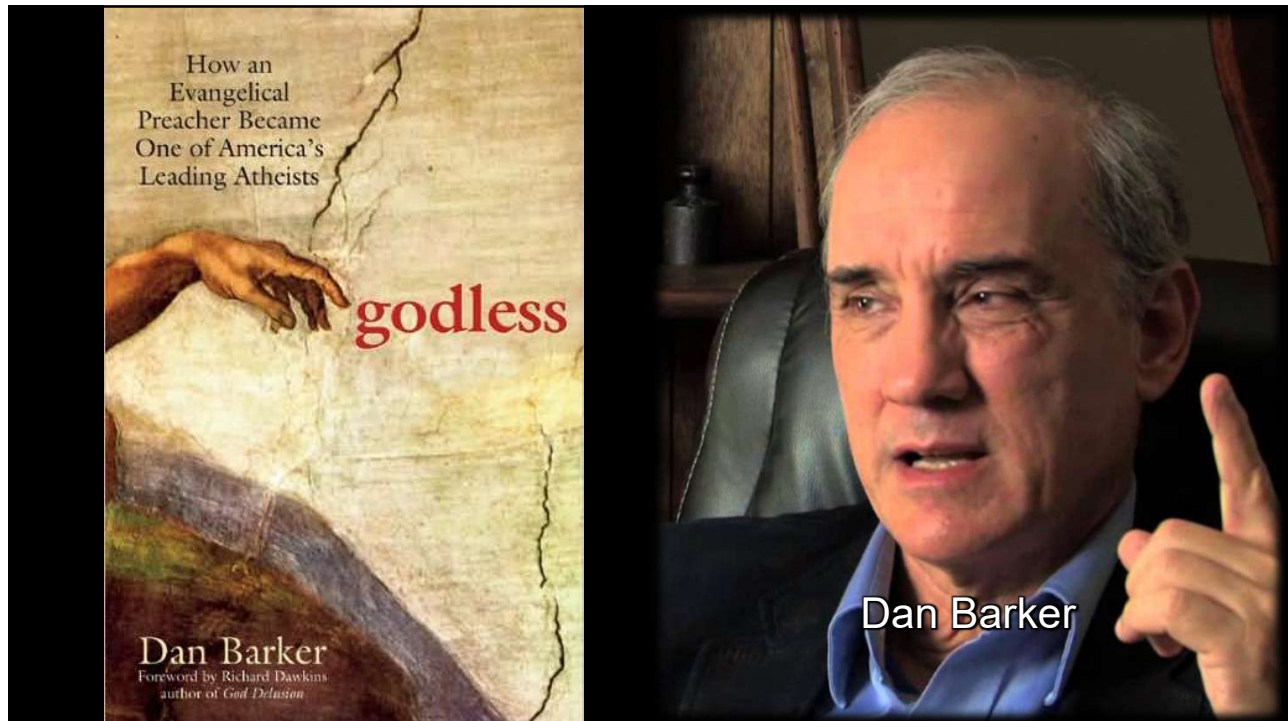
[J. P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen *Does God Exist? The Great Debate* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990): 179 republished as *Does God Exist? The Debate Between Theists and Atheists* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1993): 179]

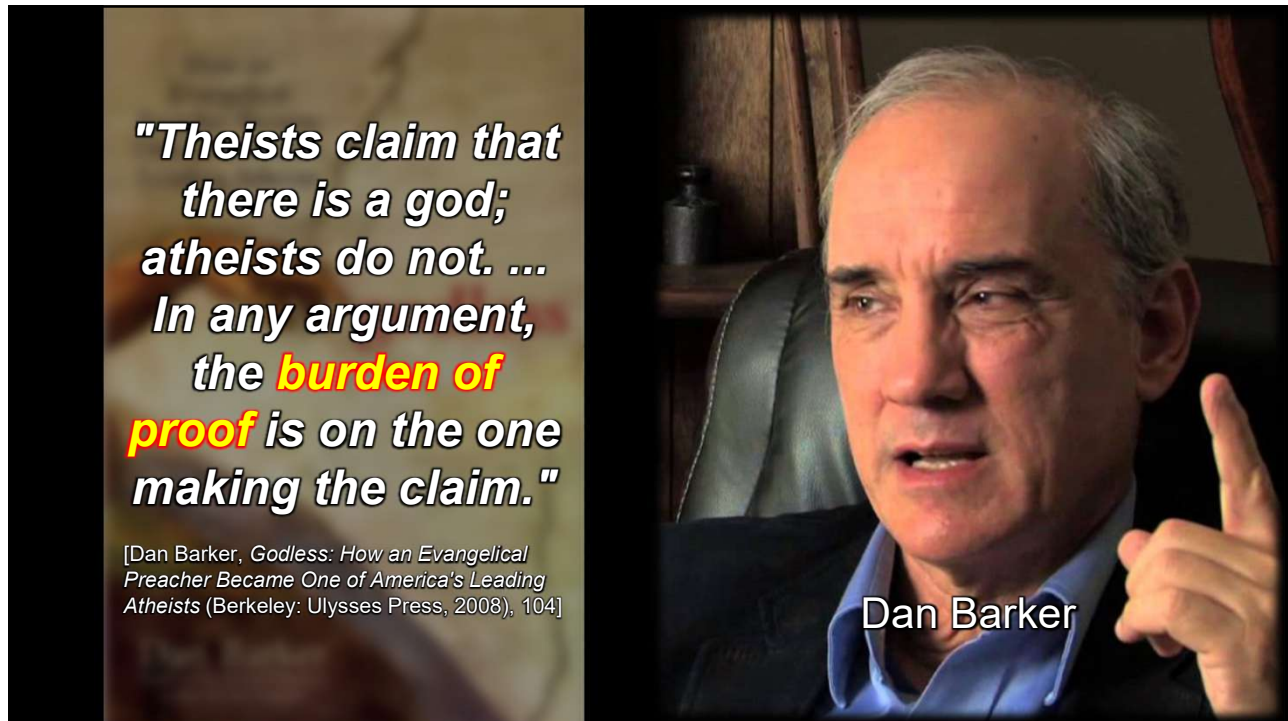
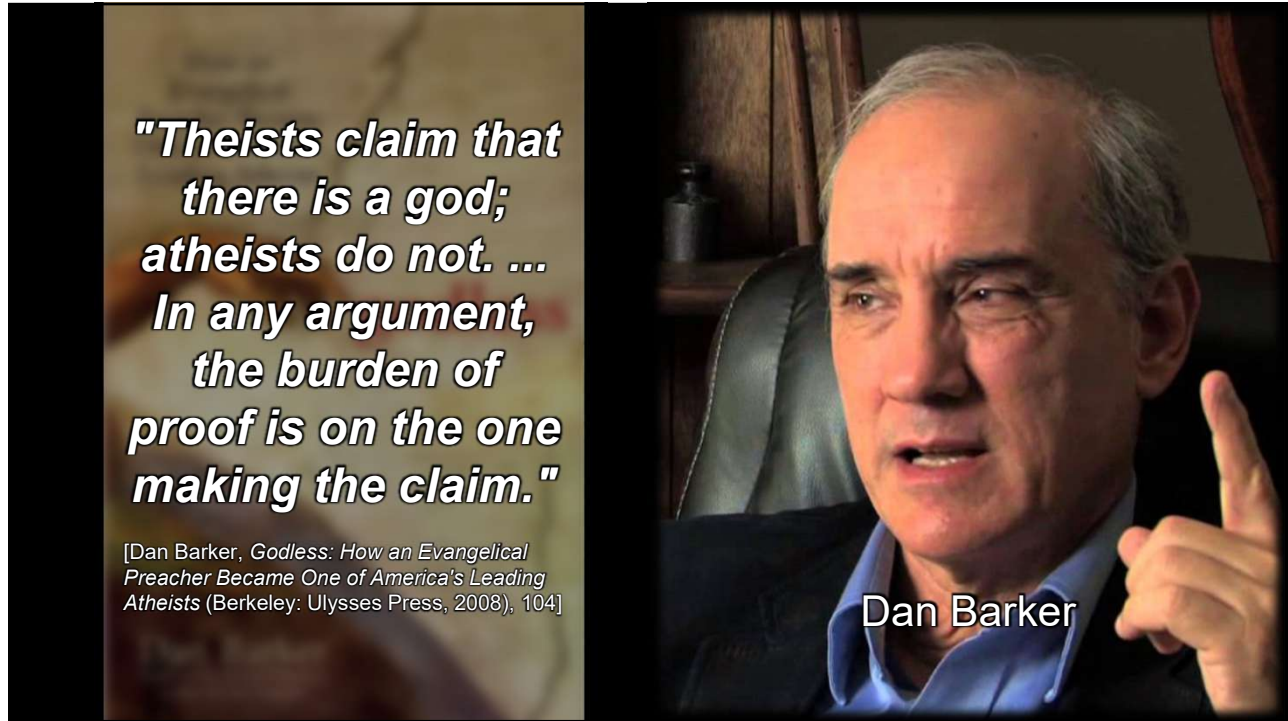


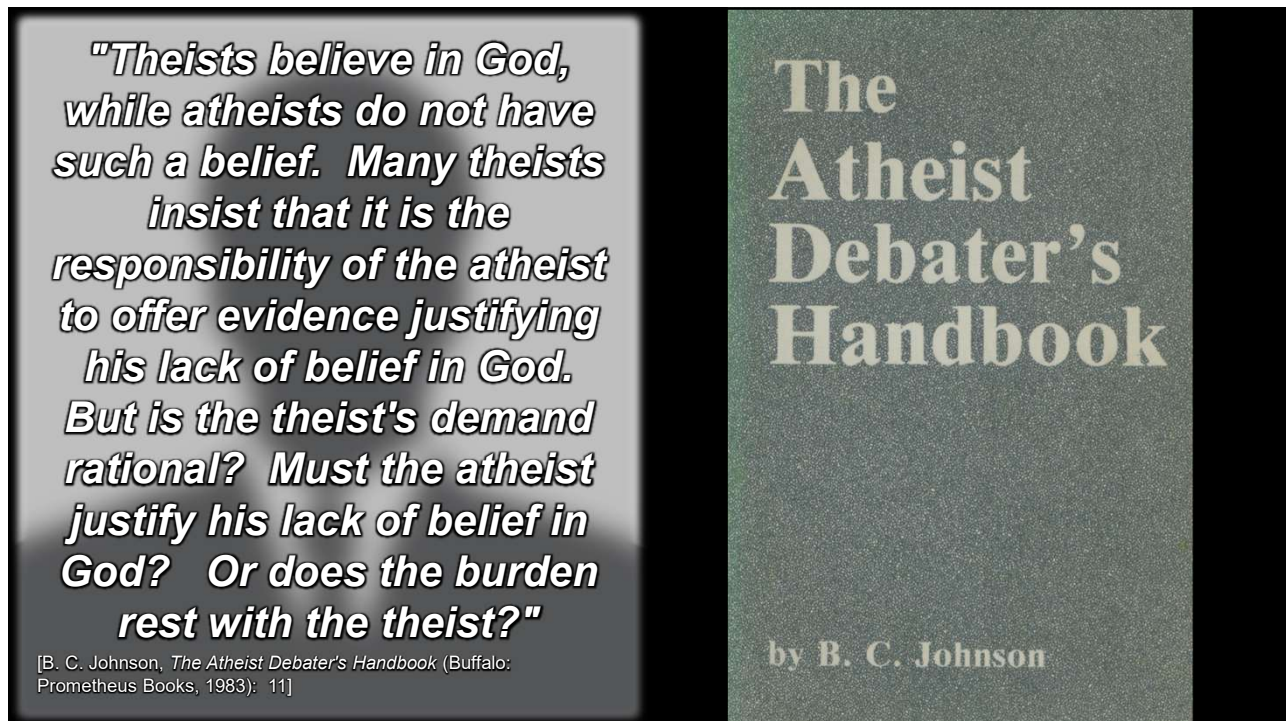
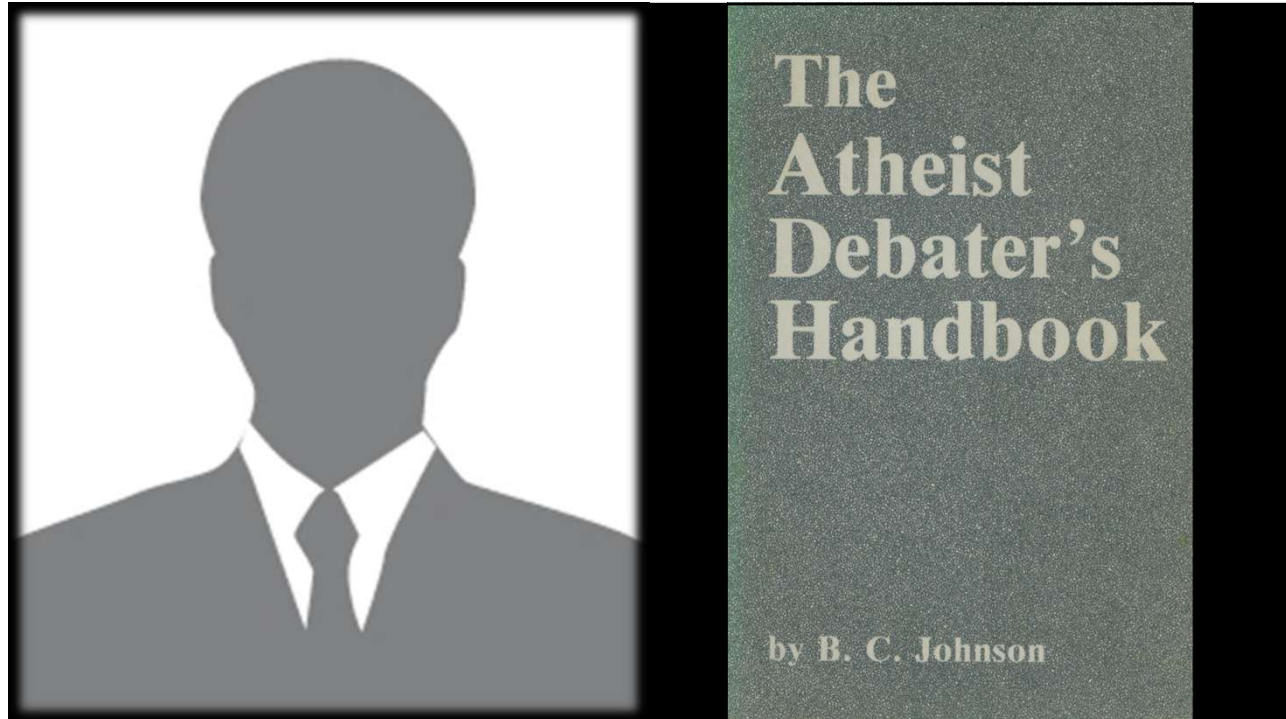
Keith Parsons



# *What's at stake in the definition of atheism?*







*"Theists believe in God, while atheists do not have such a belief. Many theists insist that it is the responsibility of the atheist to offer evidence justifying his lack of belief in God. But is the theist's demand rational? Must the atheist justify his lack of belief in God? Or does the burden rest with the theist?"*

[B. C. Johnson, *The Atheist Debater's Handbook* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1983): 11]

# The Atheist Debater's Handbook

by B. C. Johnson



***First, some atheists  
are using verbal  
slight of hand when  
they define atheism.***



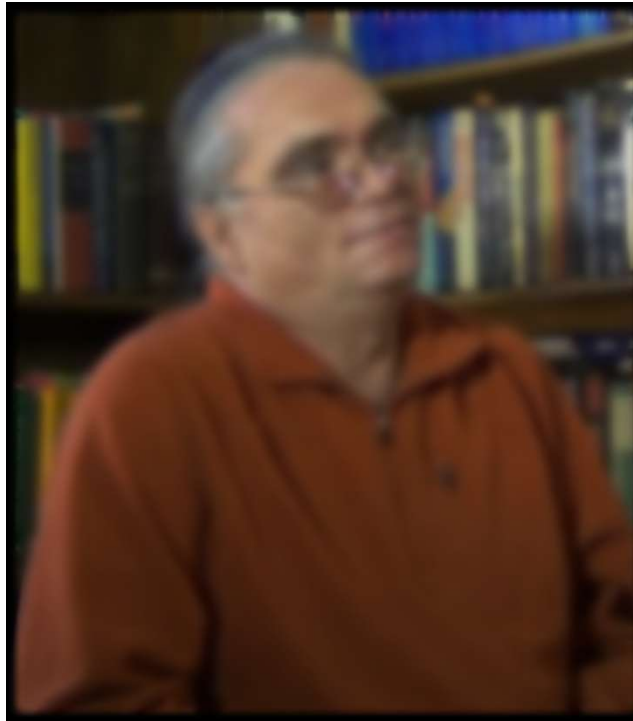
George H. Smith  
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**ATHEISM**

**THE CASE  
AGAINST  
GOD**

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The Skeptic's Bookshelf



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[George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989), 7]

Granted that the suffix "ism" constitutes a belief system, Smith still illicitly has the negation "a" negating "belief" rather than negating "God."

Thus, rather than  
**"no belief in a God"**  
 it should be  
**"a belief in no God."**

*"As used throughout this book, 'theism' signifies the belief in any god or number of gods. The prefix 'a' means 'without,' so the term 'a-theism' literally means 'without theism,' or without belief in a god or gods."*

[George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989), 7]

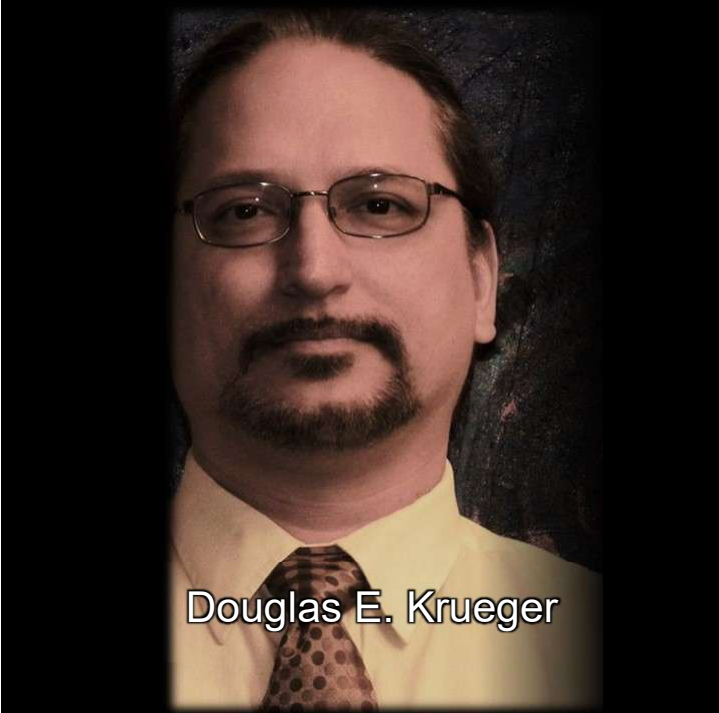


Douglas E. Krueger

# What Is ATHEISM?

A Short Introduction

**DOUGLAS E. KRUEGER**



Douglas E. Krueger

***"The term 'atheism' is from the Greek atheos. The prefix 'a' means 'without,' and the Greek theos means 'god,' so atheism means simply 'being without god.' Theism asserts that there is a god, so atheism is the view which does not assert that there is a god."***

[Douglas E. Krueger, *What is Atheism? A Short Introduction* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1998), 17]

**Notice that Krueger  
moves from the alpha**

**"The term 'atheism' is  
from the Greek atheos.  
The prefix 'a' means  
'without,' and the Greek  
theos means 'god,' so  
atheism means simply  
'being without god.'  
Theism asserts that  
there is a god, so  
atheism is the view  
which does not assert  
that there is a god."**

[Douglas E. Krueger, *What is Atheism? A Short Introduction* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1998), 17]

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Notice that Krueger moves from the alpha negating 'god' (which would mean 'without god' or 'not-god') to the alpha negating the **assertion** (which means the absence of the assertion of god instead of the absence of god).

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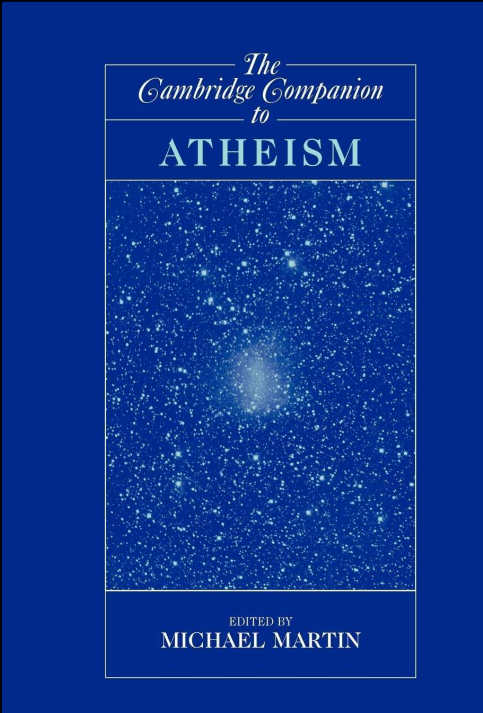
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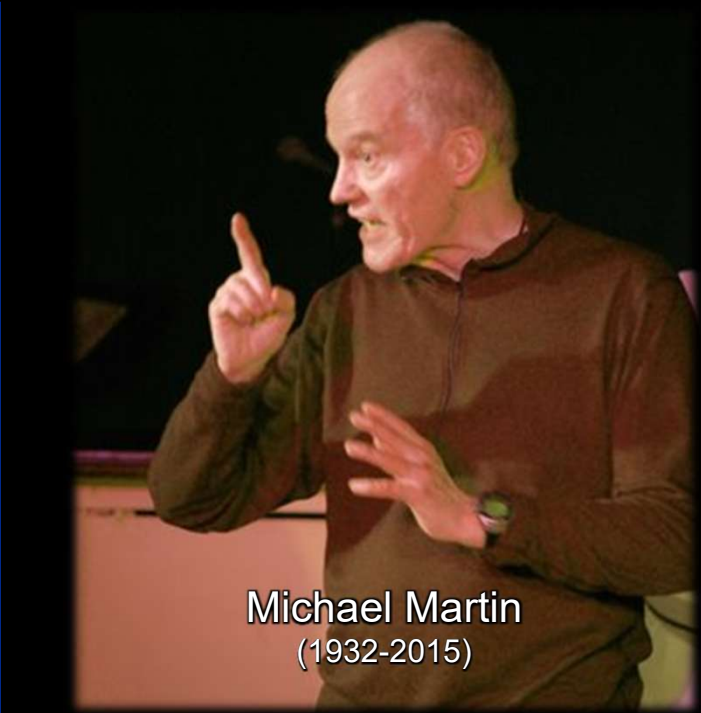
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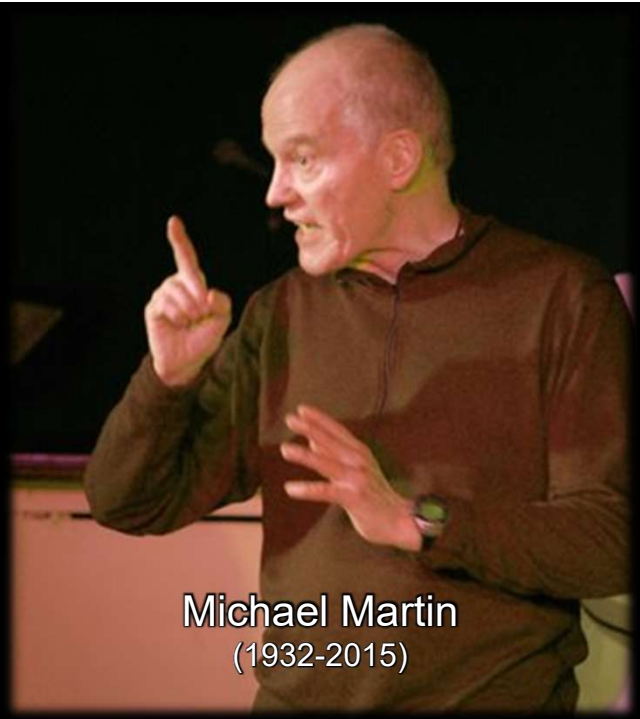
*The Cambridge Companion to*  
ATHEISM  
EDITED BY  
MICHAEL MARTIN



Michael Martin  
(1932-2015)

*"If you look up 'atheism' in a dictionary, you will find it defined as the belief that there is no God. Certainly, many people understand 'atheism' in this way. Yet this is not what the term means if one considers it from the point of view of its Greek roots. In Greek 'a' means 'without' or 'not' and 'theos' 'god.' From this standpoint, an atheist is someone without a belief in God; he or she need not be someone who believes that God does not exist."*

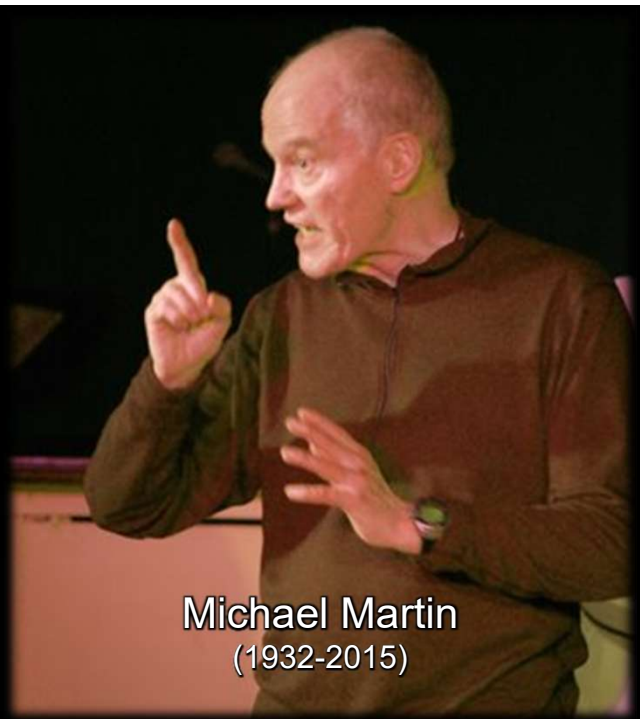
[n.a., "General Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1]



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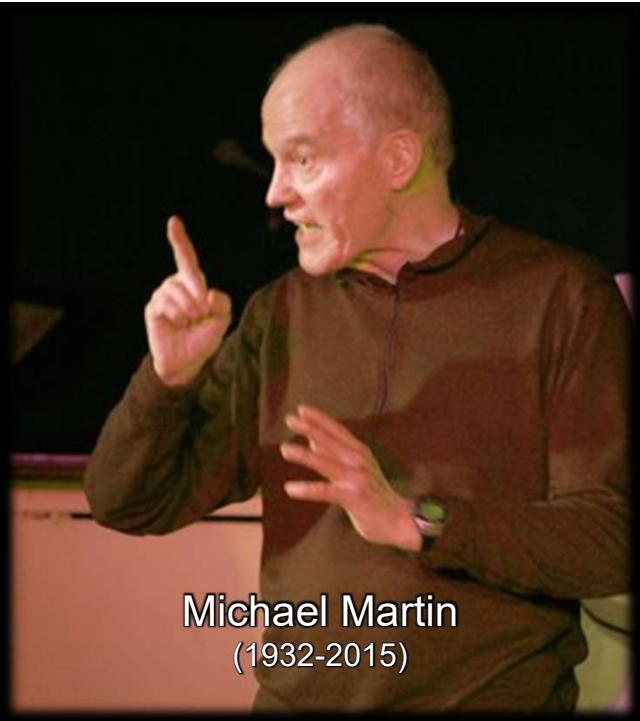
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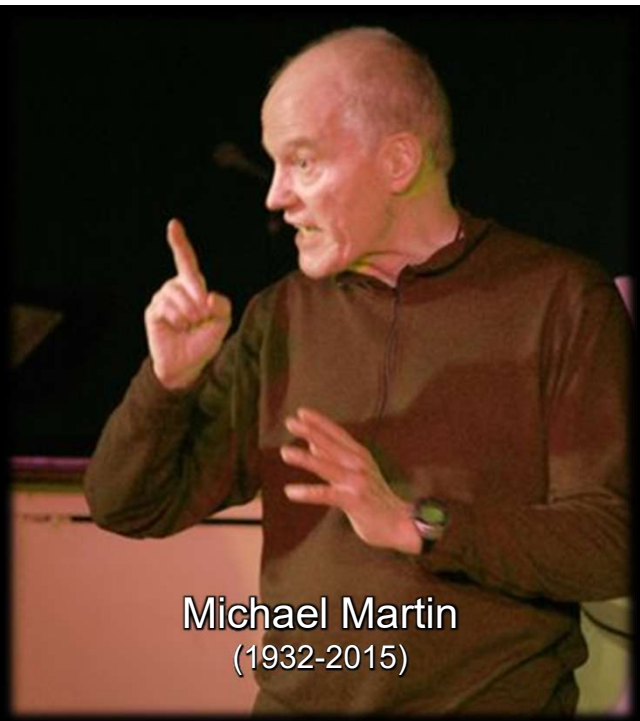
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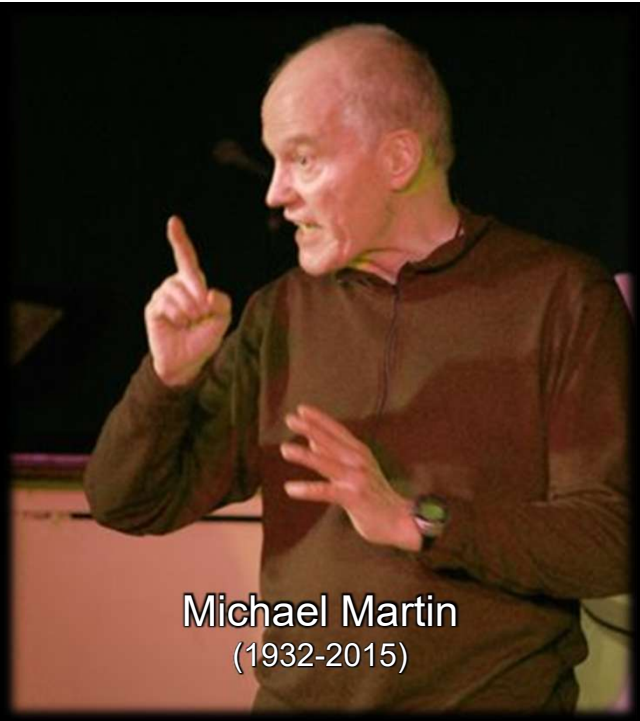
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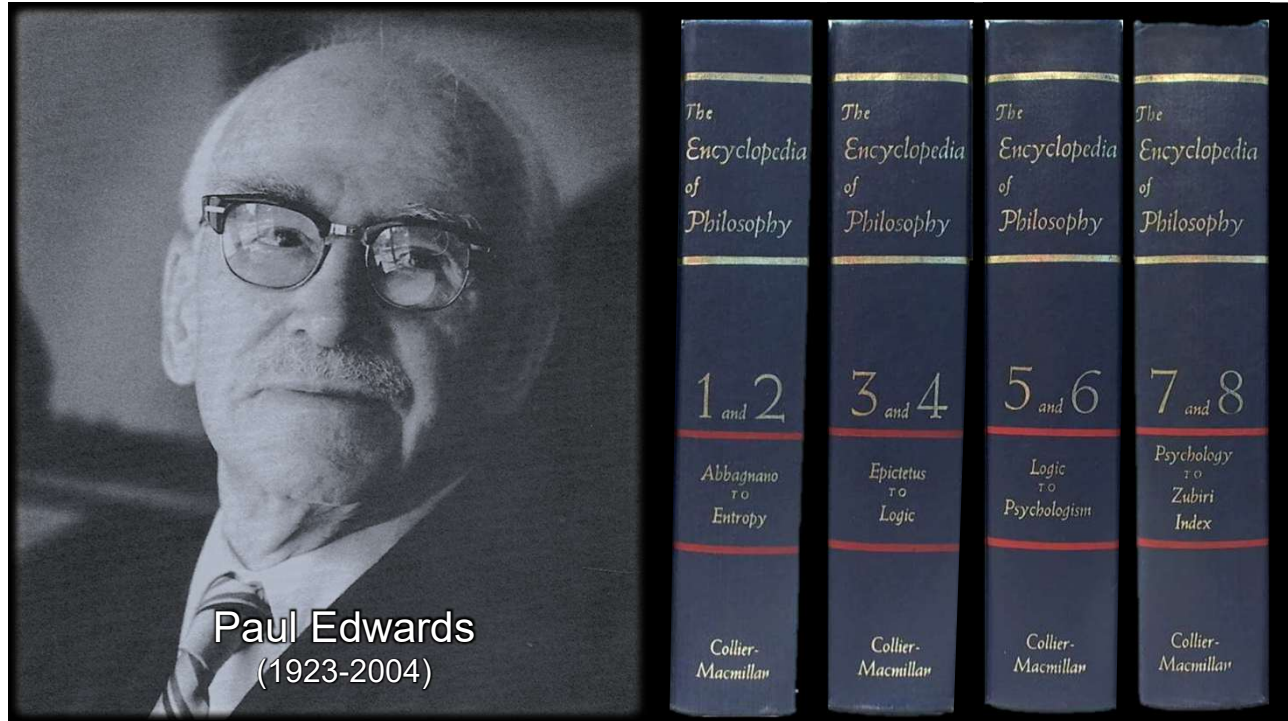
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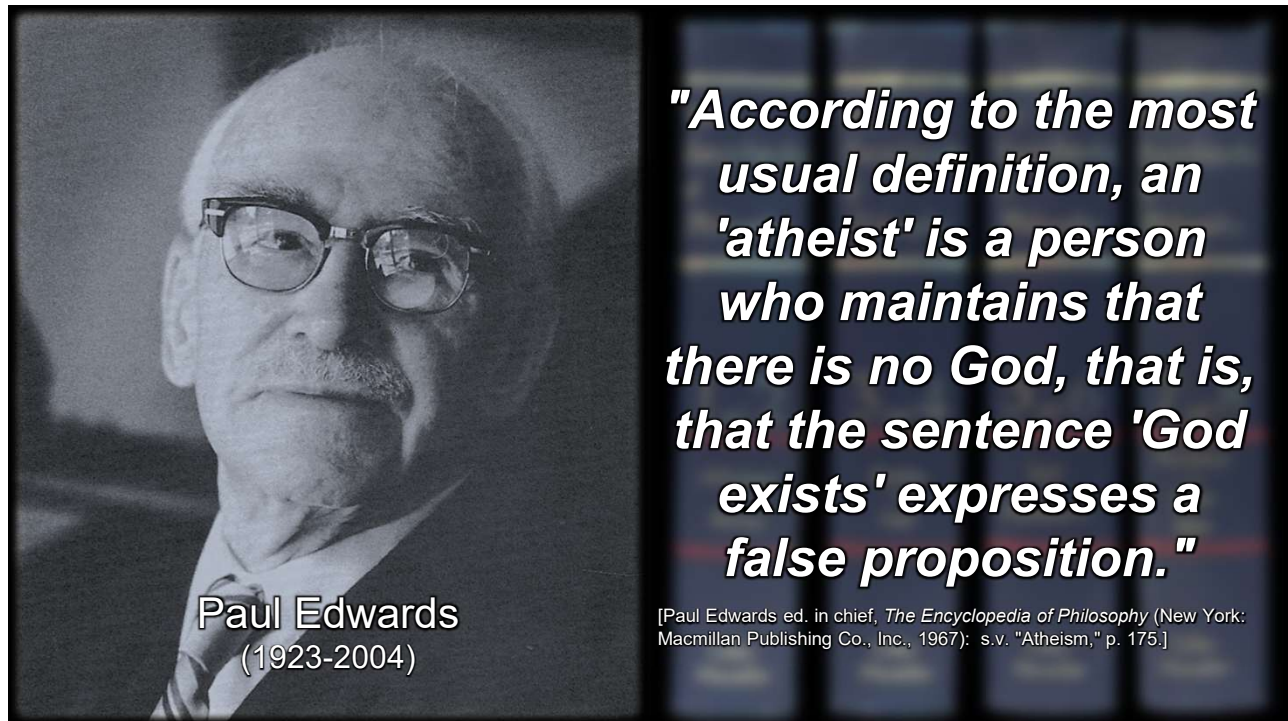
Michael Martin  
(1932-2015)



**Second, this definition conflicts with the standard academic definition of atheism.**




Paul Edwards  
(1923-2004)



Paul Edwards  
(1923-2004)

**"According to the most usual definition, an 'atheist' is a person who maintains that there is no God, that is, that the sentence 'God exists' expresses a false proposition."**

[Paul Edwards ed. in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1967): s.v. "Atheism," p. 175.]




Ernest Nagel  
(1901-1985)

# Critiques of GOD

Making the case against belief in God

Edited by  
**PETER A. ANGELES**

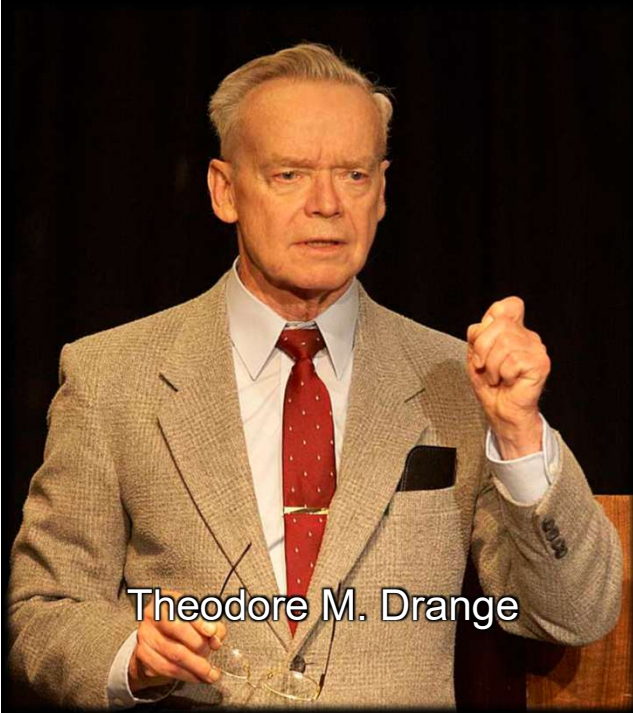
- KURT BAIER
- JOHN DEWEY
- PAUL EDWARDS
- ANTONY FLEW
- SIGMUND FREUD
- ERICH FROMM
- SIDNEY HOOK
- WALTER KAUFMANN
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- H. J. McCLOSKEY
- ERNEST NAGEL
- KAI NIELSEN
- RICHARD ROBINSON
- BERTRAND RUSSELL
- MICHAEL SCRIVEN



Ernest Nagel  
(1901-1985)

***"[A]theism is not to be identified with sheer unbelief... A child who has received no religious instruction ... is not an atheist—for he is not denying any theistic claims."***

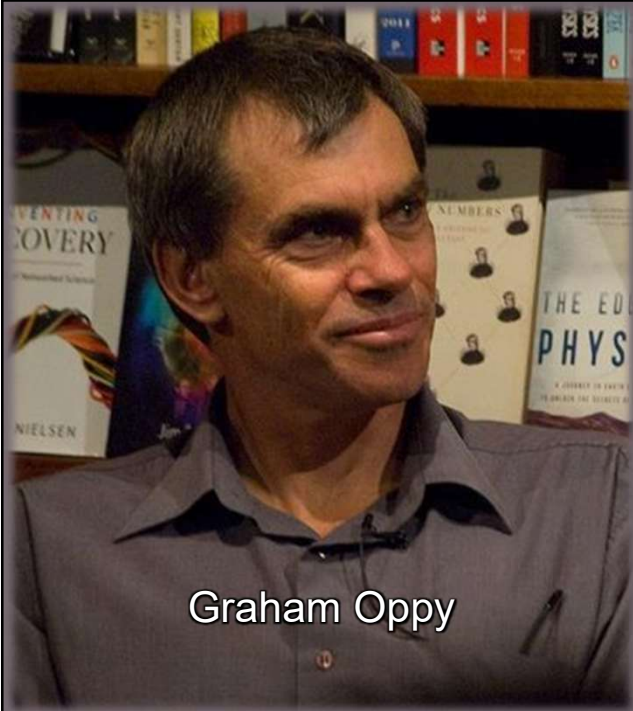
[Ernest Nagel, "Philosophical Concepts of Atheism" in *Critiques of God: Making the Case Against Belief in God*, Peter A. Angeles, ed. pp. 4-5]



**Theodore M. Drange**

***"Is the proposition that God exists true or false? You are a theist if and only if you say that the proposition is true or probably true, you are an atheist if and only if you say that it is false or probably false, and you are an agnostic if and only if you understand what the proposition is, but resist giving either answer, and support your resistance by saying, 'The evidence is insufficient' (or words to that effect)."***

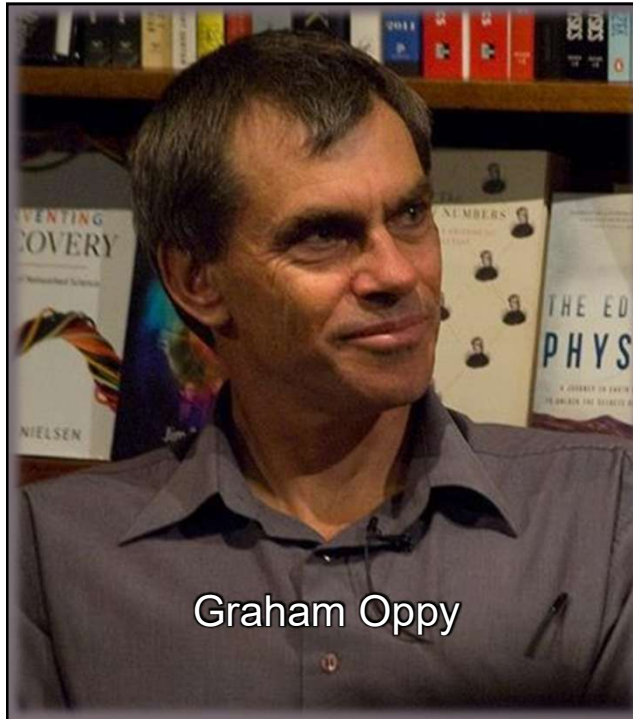
[Theodore M. Drange "Atheism, Agnosticism, Noncognitivism," from [https://infidels.org/library/modern/theodore\\_drange/definition.html](https://infidels.org/library/modern/theodore_drange/definition.html), accessed 01/15/19]



**Graham Oppy**

***"Properly, we should define theism as the view that there's at least one god and atheism as the view that there are no gods, and monotheism then as the view that there is exactly one God and we call that one God with a capital 'G'. Atheists then are people who believe that there are no gods and particular in our context, they believe that God doesn't exist."***

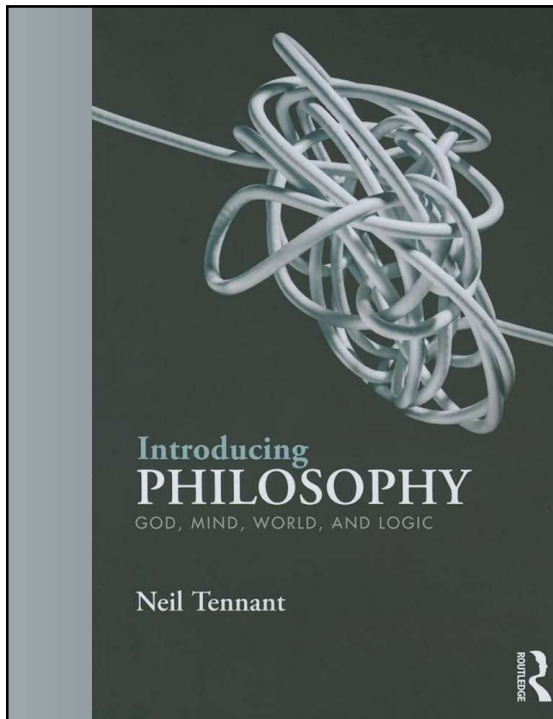
...



Graham Oppy

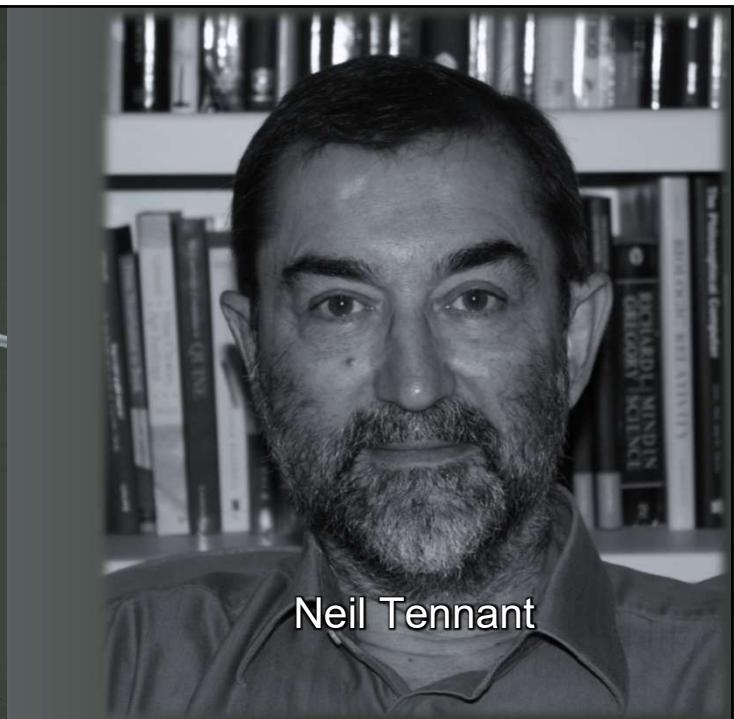
***"Other people like to say that atheism is just lacking the belief that God exists which lumps together ... the class of agnostics with the class of atheists; if you define it that way, which I don't like."***

[Graham Oppy vs. Ben Arbour, "The Ontological Argument" on *Capturing Christianity*, You Tube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udxfuPgq4TY>, @1:05:20, accessed 06/13/22]



Introducing  
**PHILOSOPHY**  
GOD, MIND, WORLD, AND LOGIC

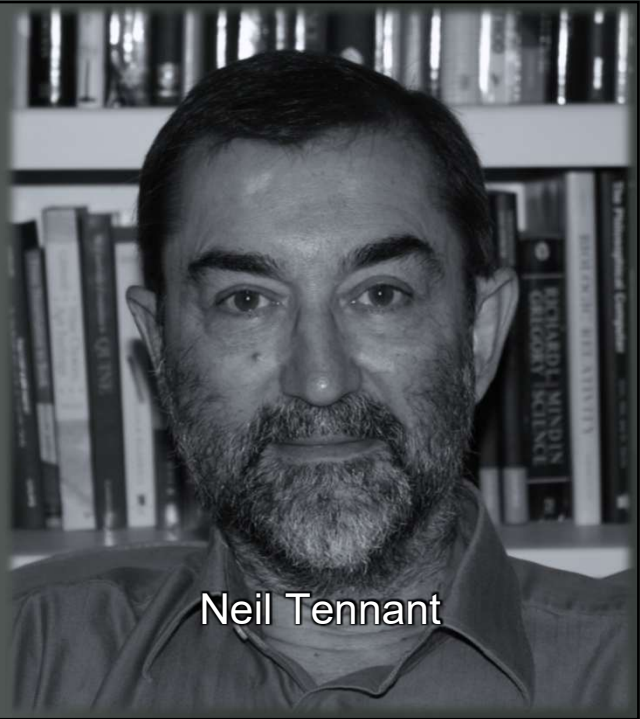
Neil Tennant



Neil Tennant

***"['Does God exist?'] is a philosophical question. At one extreme, the theist will answer 'Yes', and off all manner of arguments and considerations in support of that answer. At the other extreme, the atheist will answer 'No', and likewise offer all manner of arguments and considerations in support of that answer."***

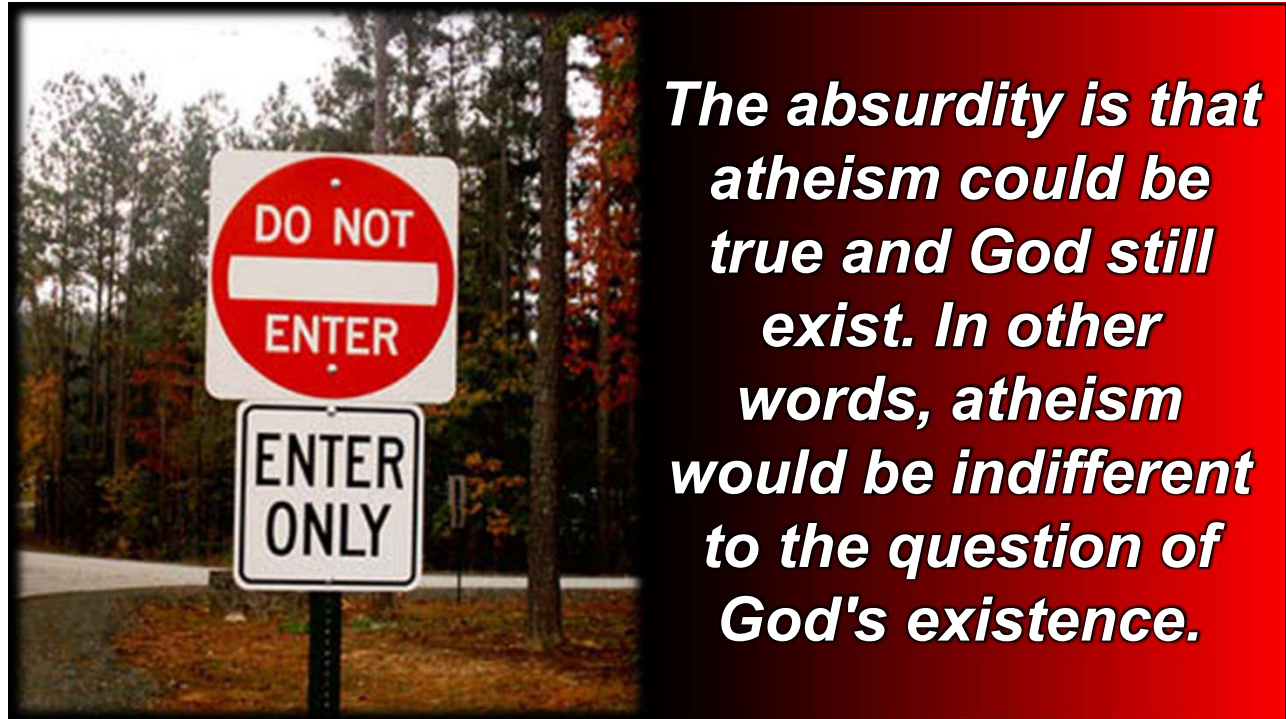
[Neil Tennant, *Introducing Philosophy: God, Mind, World, and Logic* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 29]

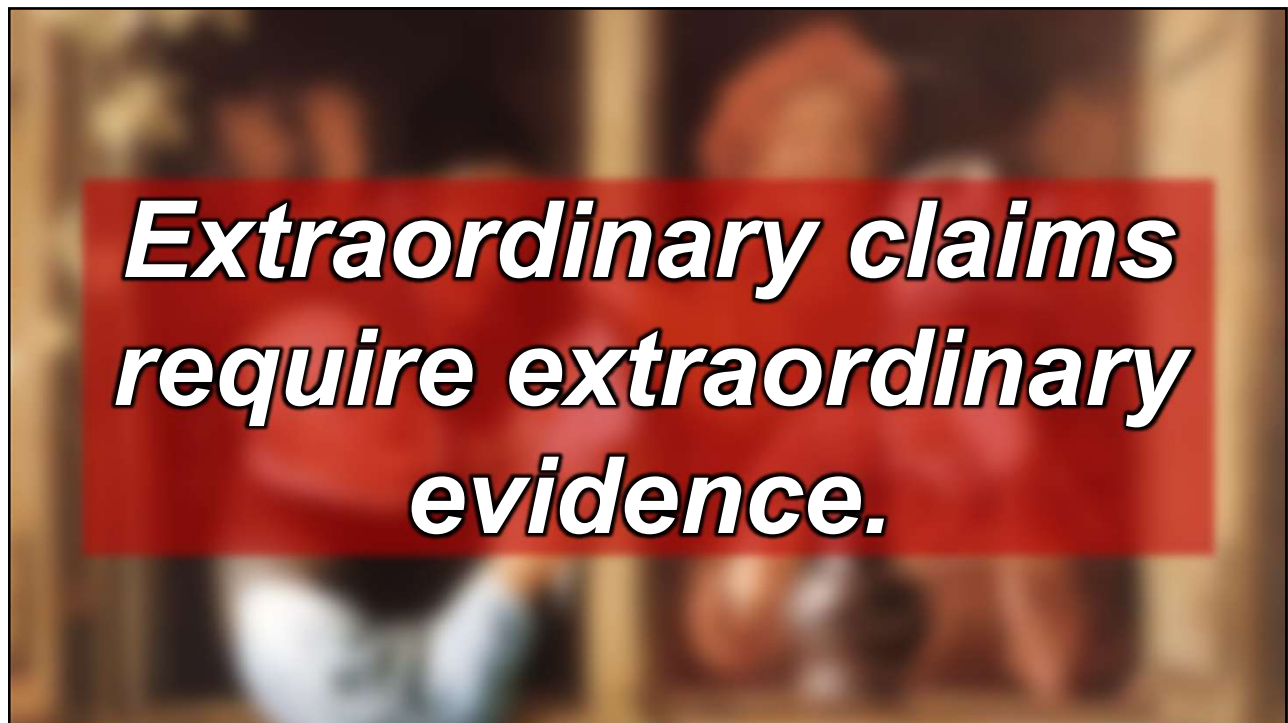


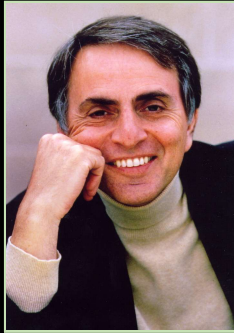
Neil Tennant



***Third, this definition entails an absurdity if not an outright contradiction.***







***Extraordinary claims require  
extraordinary evidence***

- Carl Sagan  
(1934-1996)



***Why must  
extraordinary  
claims require  
extraordinary  
evidence?***



***Why must a claim  
that has  
characteristic X,  
necessarily have  
evidence that has  
characteristic X?***



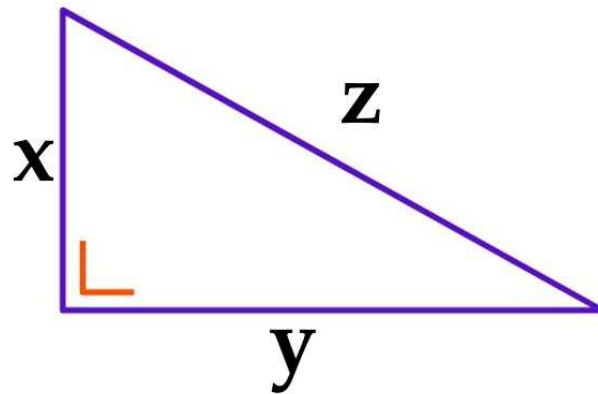
***If a claim is simple  
and rather  
straightforward, must  
the evidence for that  
claim also be simple  
and rather  
straightforward?***



***Consider  
Fermat's  
Last Theorem.***

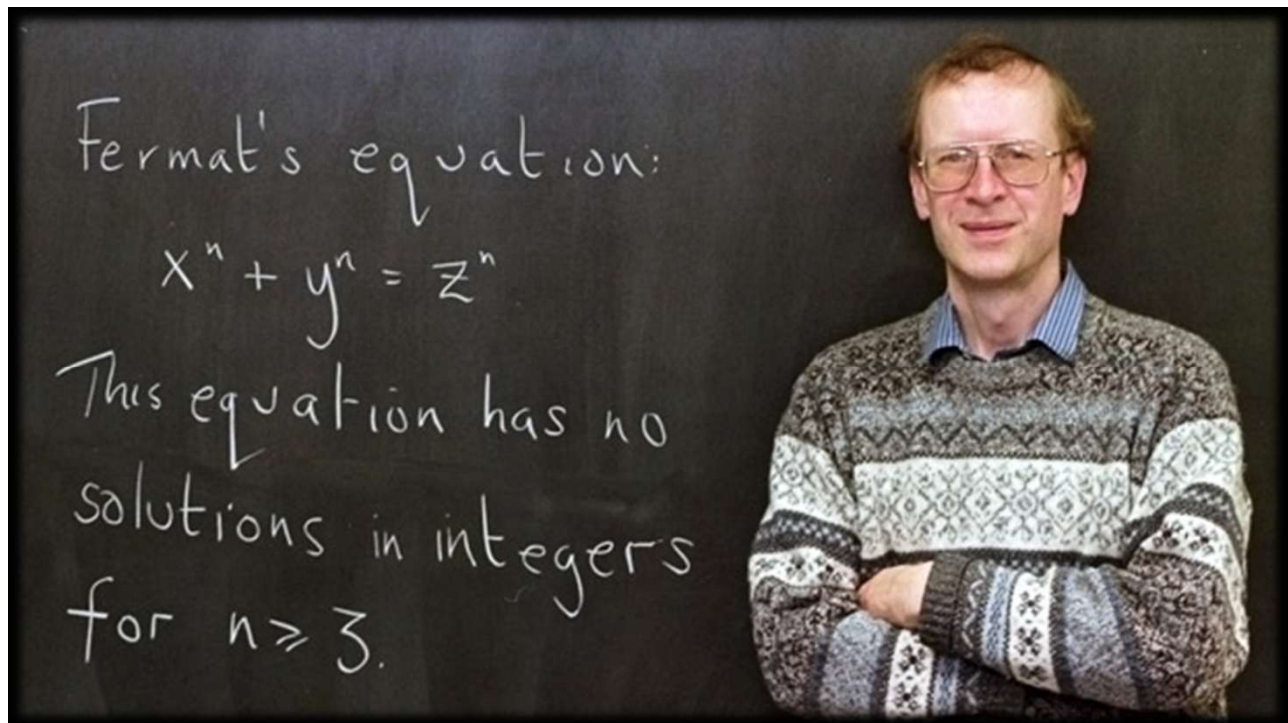


**Pierre de Fermat**  
1601 - 1665



Pythagorean Theorem

$$x^2 + y^2 = z^2$$



**Andrew Wiles' proof of Fermat's Last Theorem was over 100 pages in the Annals of Mathematics 1995; very complicated evidence for a very simple claim!**

Wiles, Andrew (1995). "Modular elliptic curves and Fermat's Last Theorem." *Annals of Mathematics* 141 (3): 443–551.

Annals of Mathematics, 142 (1995), 443–551

## Modular elliptic curves and Fermat's Last Theorem

By ANDREW WILES\*

For Nada, Clare, Kate and Olivia

*Cubum autem in duos cubos, aut quadratoquadratum in duos quadratoquadratos, et generaliter nullam in infinitum ultra quadratum potestatem in duos ejusdem nominis fas est dividere: cuius rei demonstrationem mirabilem sane detexi. Hanc marginis exiguitas non caperet.*

Pierre de Fermat

### Introduction

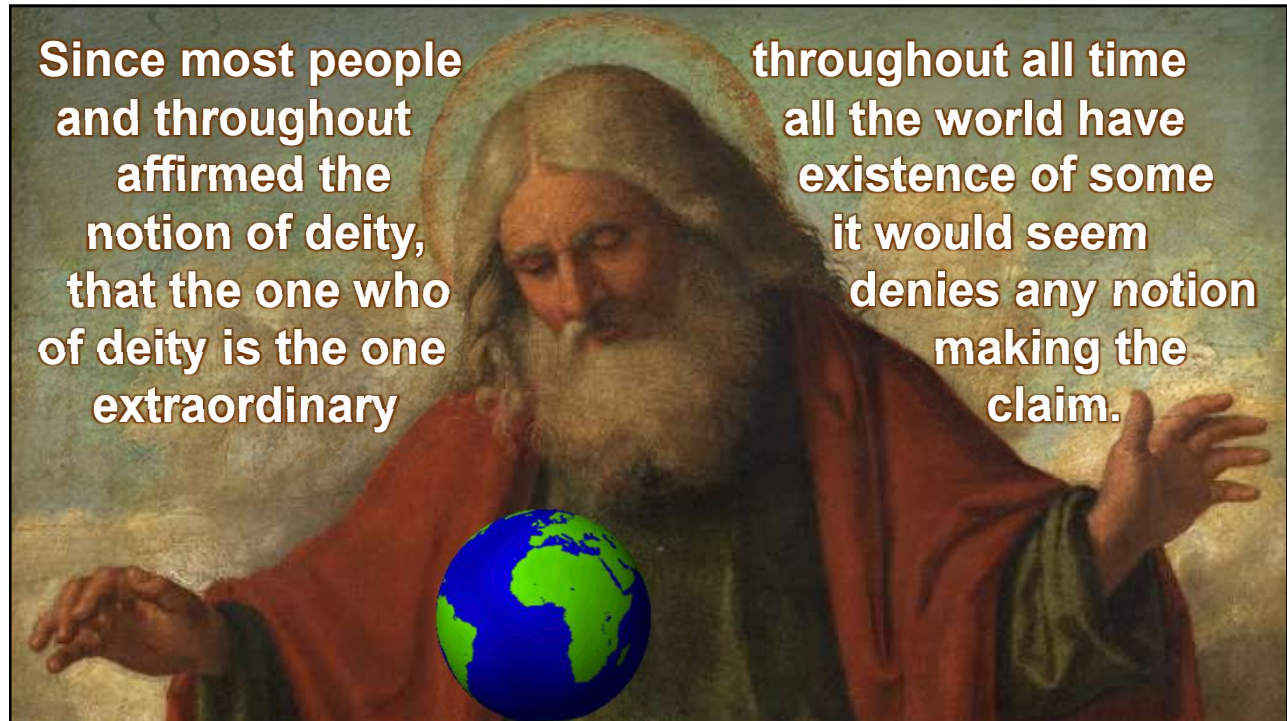
An elliptic curve over  $\mathbf{Q}$  is said to be modular if it has a finite covering by a modular curve of the form  $X_0(N)$ . Any such elliptic curve has the property that its Hasse-Weil zeta function has an analytic continuation and satisfies a functional equation of the standard type. If an elliptic curve over  $\mathbf{Q}$  with a given  $j$ -invariant is modular then it is easy to see that all elliptic curves with the same  $j$ -invariant are modular (in which case we say that the  $j$ -invariant is modular). A well-known conjecture which grew out of the work of Shimura and Taniyama in the 1950's and 1960's asserts that every elliptic curve over  $\mathbf{Q}$  is modular. However, it only became widely known through its publication in a paper of Weil in 1967 [We] (as an exercise for the interested reader!), in which, moreover, Weil gave conceptual evidence for the conjecture. Although it had been numerically verified in many cases, prior to the results described in this paper it had only been known that finitely many  $j$ -invariants were modular.

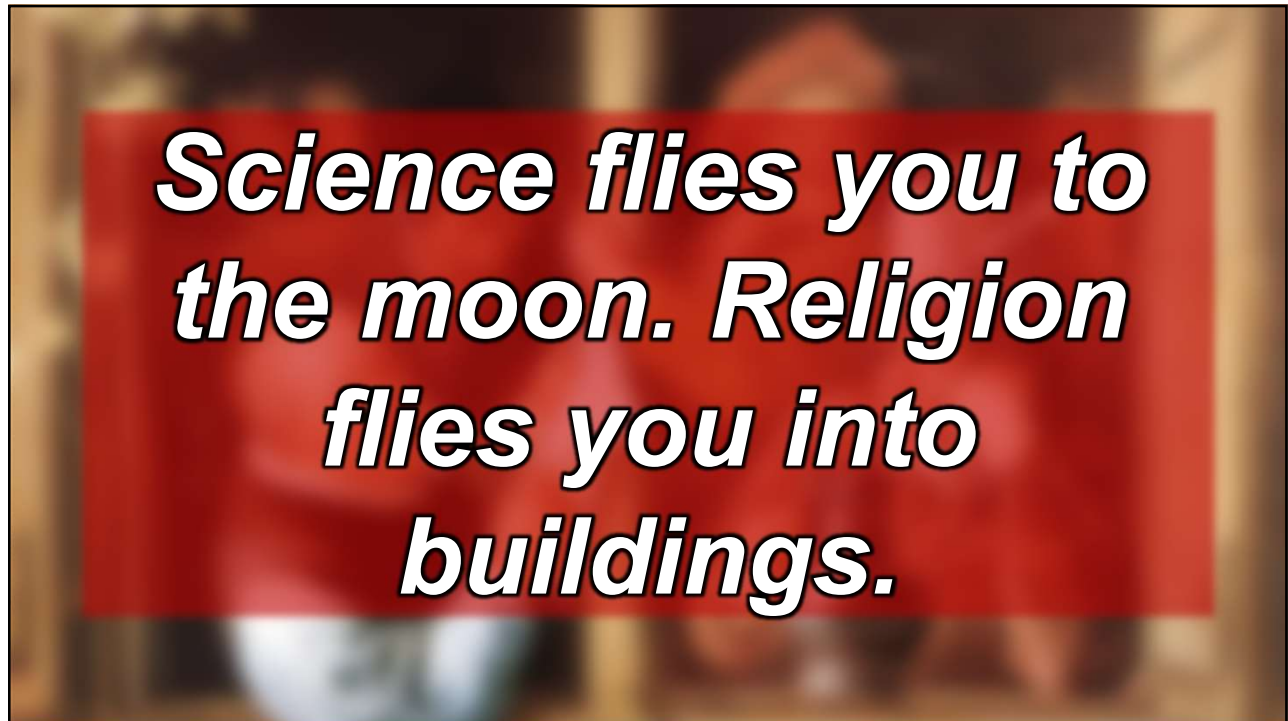
In 1985 Frey made the remarkable observation that this conjecture should imply Fermat's Last Theorem. The precise mechanism relating the two was formulated by Serre as the  $\varepsilon$ -conjecture and this was then proved by Ribet in the summer of 1986. Ribet's result only requires one to prove the conjecture for semistable elliptic curves in order to deduce Fermat's Last Theorem.

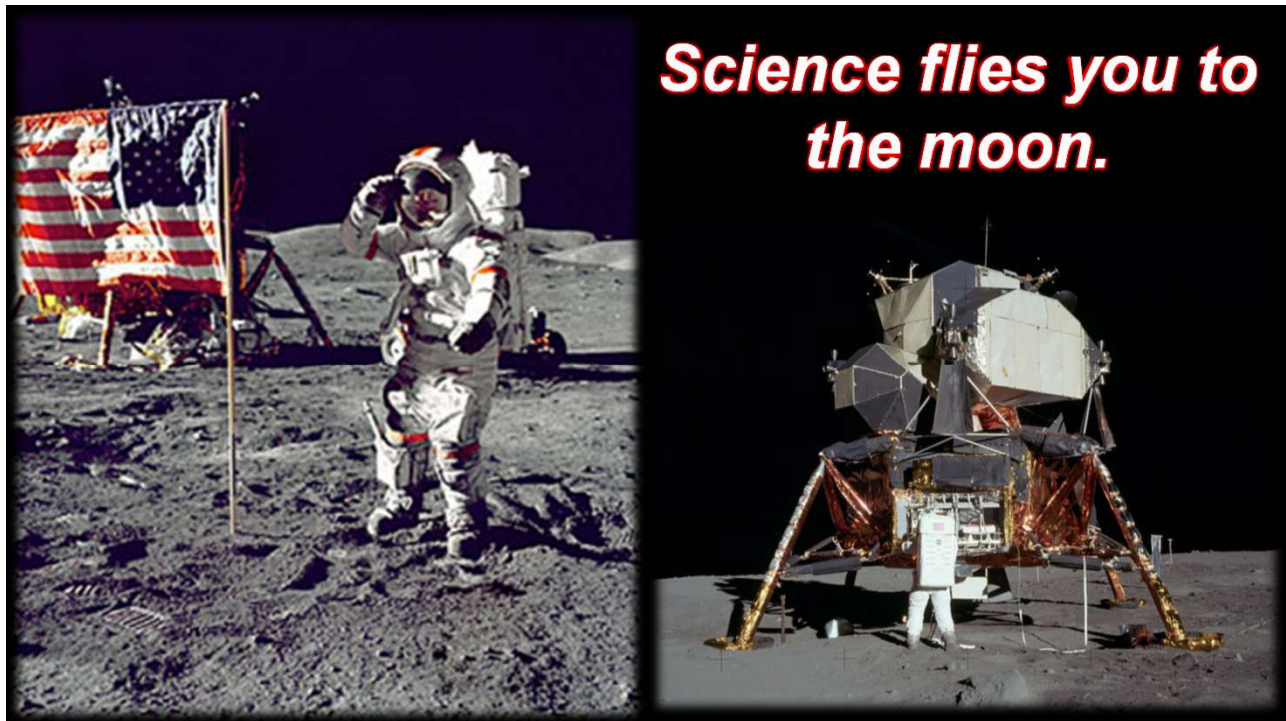
\*The work on this paper was supported by an NSF grant.

**What is more,  
exactly what  
makes a claim  
extraordinary in  
the first place?**





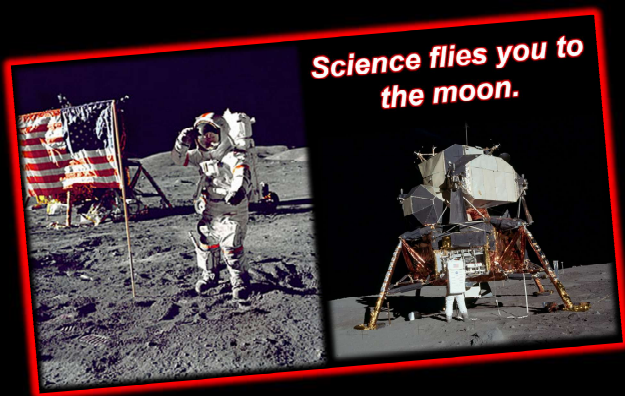




***Religion flies you  
into buildings.***



***Science is good.  
Religion is bad.***



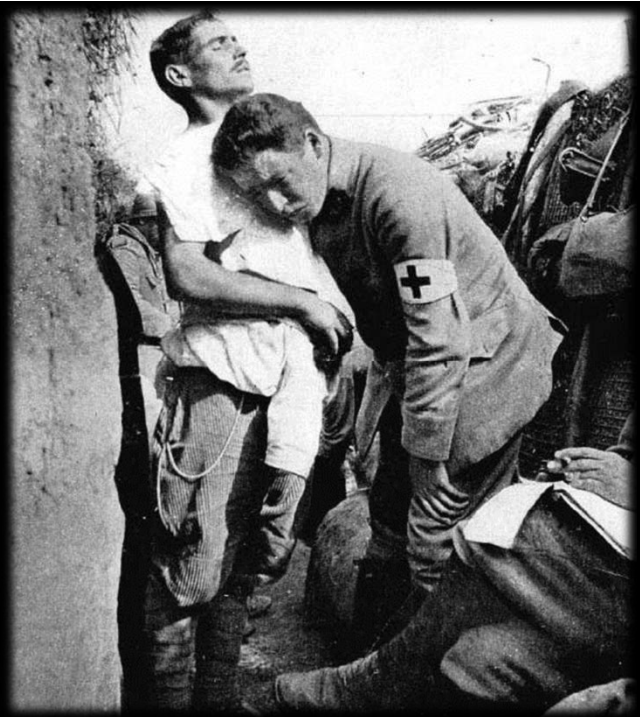
***Science flies you to  
the moon.***



***Religion flies you  
into buildings.***



***Religion cares for  
the injured, sick,  
and hungry.***





**Religion is good.  
Science is bad.**



*Government protects  
the innocent and  
establishes justice.*



*The private sector  
robs and pillages  
the innocent and  
flouts justice.*



# **Government is good. The private sector is bad.**

**Government protects  
the innocent and  
establishes justice.**



**The private sector  
robs and pillages  
the innocent and  
flouts justice.**



**The private sector  
contributes to  
community  
flourishing.**

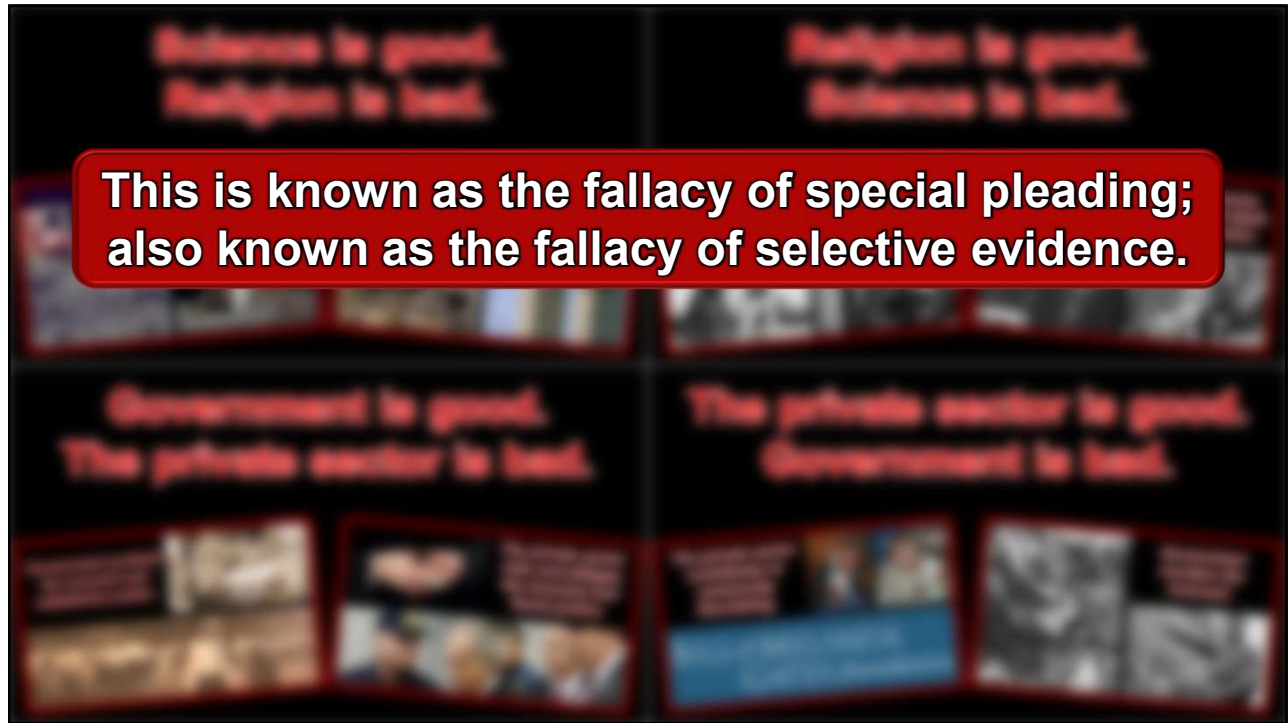


**BILL & MELINDA  
GATES *foundation***



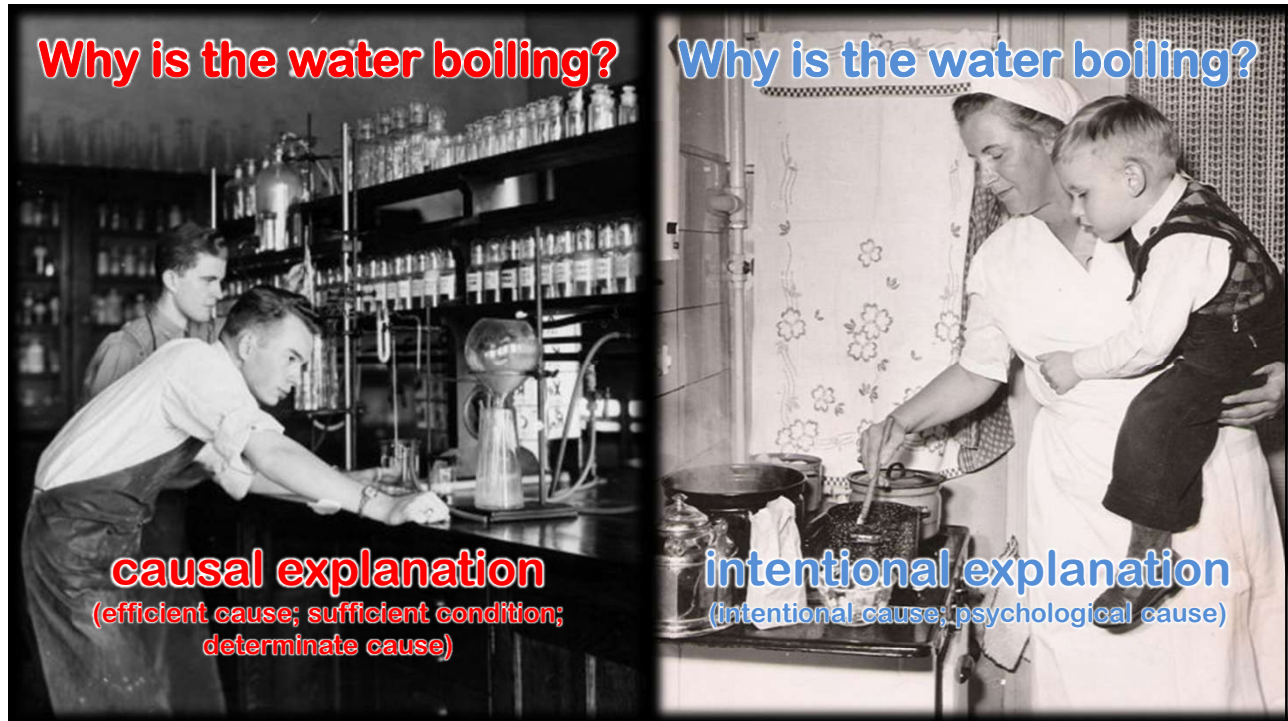
# Thus, depending on your selection of the evidence, you could argue:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Science is good.<br/>Religion is bad.</b></p>               | <p><b>Religion is good.<br/>Science is bad.</b></p>               |
| <p><b>Government is good.<br/>The private sector is bad.</b></p>  | <p><b>The private sector is good.<br/>Government is bad.</b></p>  |









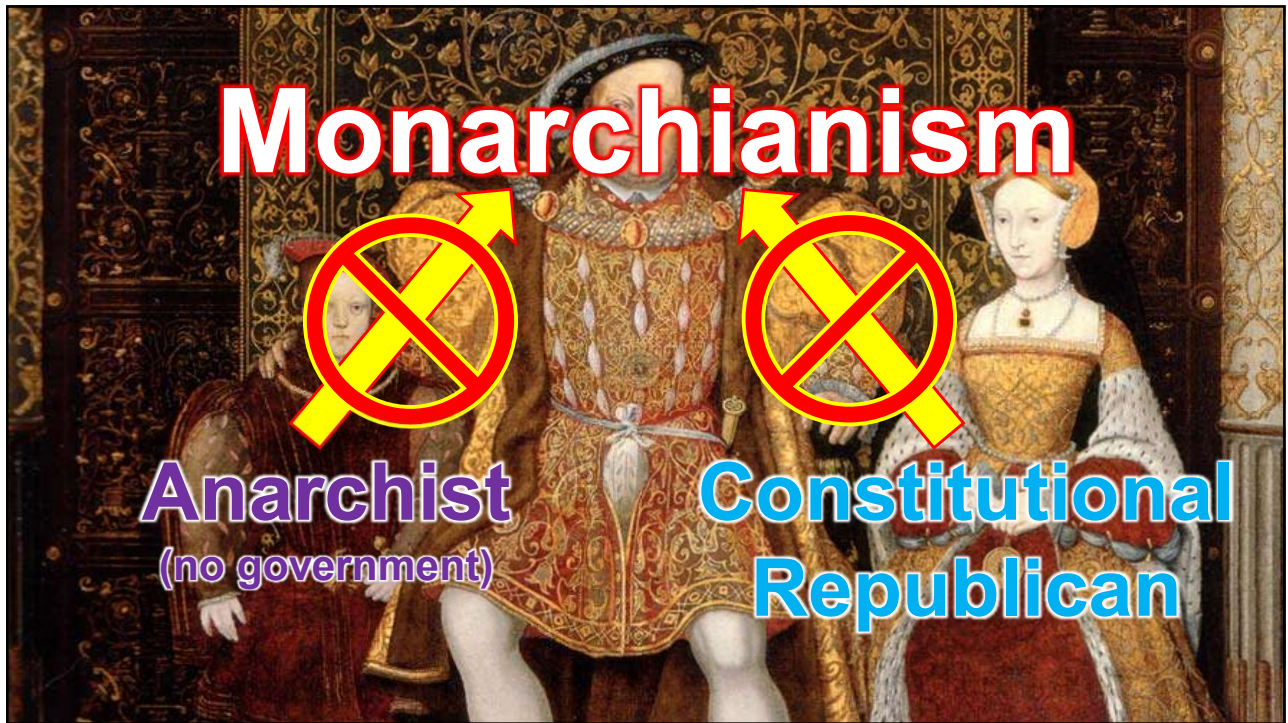
***We are all atheists  
about most Gods. I'm  
just an atheist about  
one more God  
than you.***

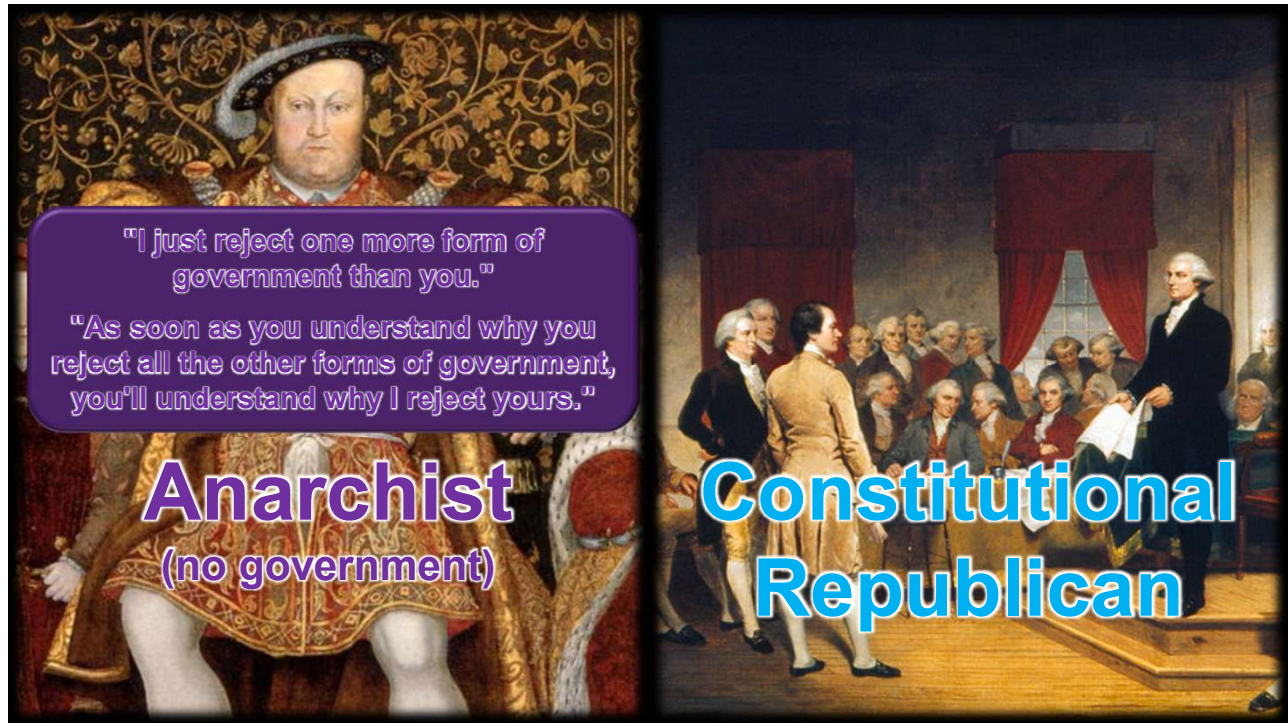
*"When you understand why you reject  
all other gods, you will understand why I  
reject yours as well." - Stephen F. Roberts*

*"I contend that we are both atheists.  
I just believe in one fewer god  
than you do.  
When you understand why you  
dismiss all the other possible gods,  
you will understand why I dismiss yours."*

*-Stephen Roberts*










**Classical theism  
does not regard God  
as one example of a  
"kind" or "genus."**




**Philosophically  
speaking, the God of  
Christianity is not  
just one example of  
the category "God"  
or Deity in contrast  
to other examples  
like Zeus or Apollo  
or Horus or Osiris.**

A photograph of Edward Feser, a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a dark suit jacket over a red shirt. He is seated and has his hands clasped in front of him, looking slightly to the right. The background shows a bookshelf and a stone archway.

Edward Feser

"The ... 'one god further' objection supposes that the God of classical theism is merely one further superhuman being alongside others who have found worshippers – Thor, Zeus, Quetzalcoatl, and so forth – only a superhuman being of even greater power, knowledge, and goodness than these other deities have.

A photograph of Edward Feser, a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a dark suit jacket over a red shirt. He is seated and has his hands clasped in front of him, looking slightly to the right. The background shows a bookshelf and a stone archway.

Edward Feser

"But of course, that is not what God is at all. He is not 'a being' alongside other beings, not even an especially impressive one, but rather Being Itself or Pure Actuality, that from which all mere 'beings' (including Thor, Zeus, and Quetzalcoatl, if they existed) derive the limited actuality or existence they possess.

A photograph of Edward Feser, a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a dark suit jacket over a maroon shirt. He is seated and has his hands clasped in front of him, looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background shows a bookshelf and a window.

Edward Feser

"Neither does He 'have' power, knowledge, goodness, and the like; rather, He *is* power, knowledge, and goodness (where the 'participation' relation in Plato's theory of Forms is transformed by the classical theist into a relation between created things and their uncaused cause, in light of the doctrine of divine simplicity – and also thereby transformed, by Thomists anyway, into a kind of efficient-causal relation)."

[Edward Feser "The 'one god further' objection."  
<https://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2011/04/one-god-further-objection.html>, accessed 01/22/24]



***Morality is doing what is right regardless of what you are told.***

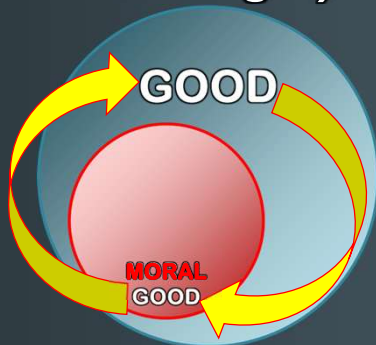
***Religion is doing what you are told regardless of what is right.***



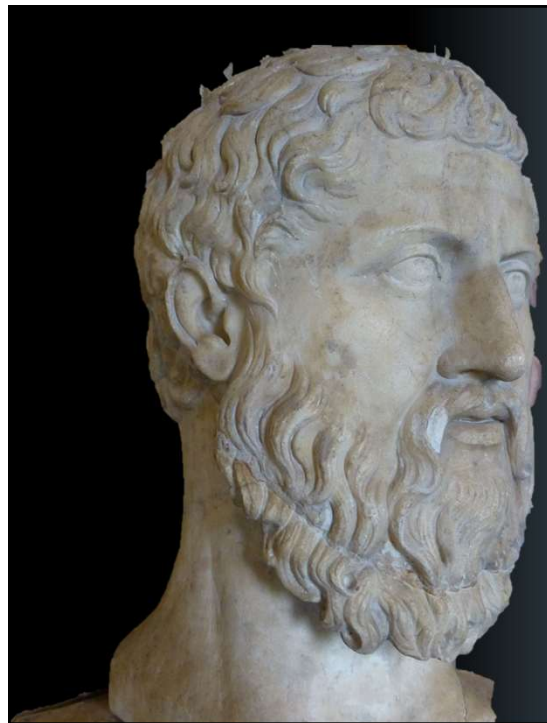
*Clearly, this "argument" is trying to make a point about human morality.*



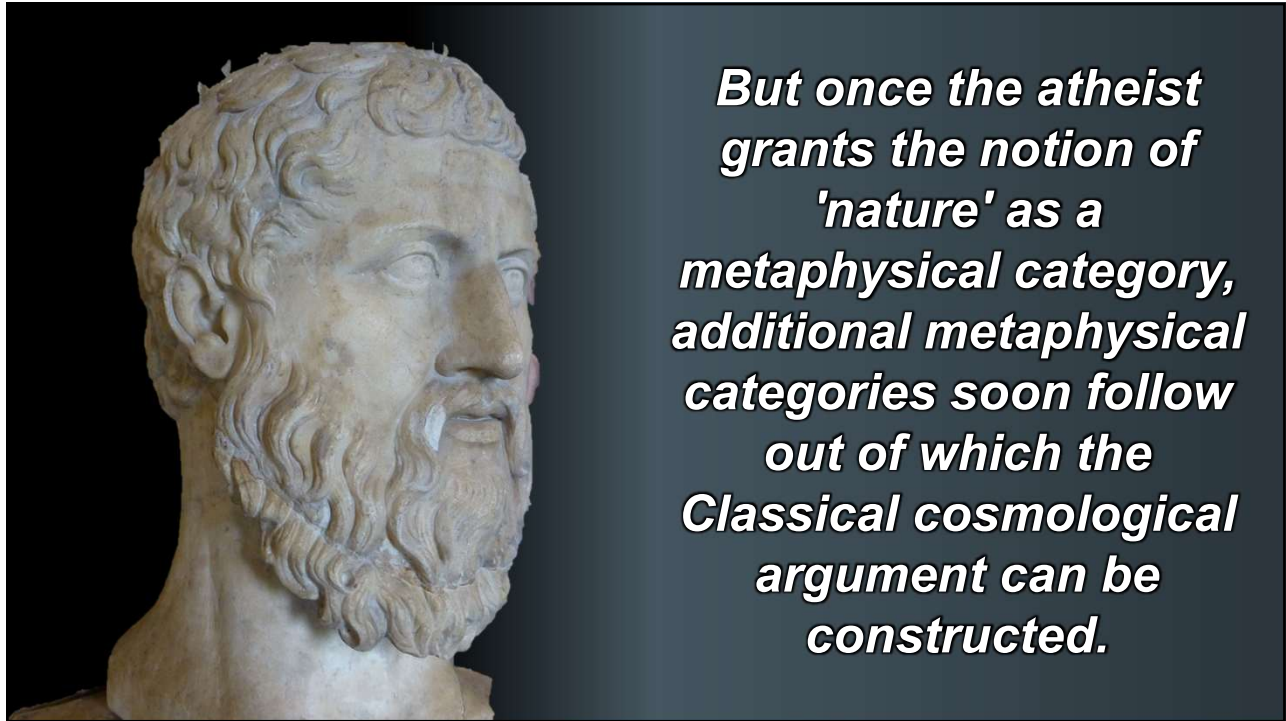
*But there is a difference that needs clarifying between good and moral good (or right and moral right).*



***Thus, before one can make any coherent philosophical argument employing the notion of moral good (or right), one must unpack the broader notion of 'good'.***



***In the Classical tradition, the notion of 'good' must be understood in terms of the nature of the thing about which the judgment 'good' is made.***






**Aristotle**  
(384-322 BC)

- ✓ *substance and accidents*
- ✓ *ten categories*
- ✓ *universals and particulars*
- ✓ *form and matter*
- ✓ *teleology*
- ✓ *act and potency*
- ✓ *four causes*
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Aquinas  
(1225-1274)



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Aquinas  
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***With these philosophical truths, the classical philosopher can demonstrate the existence and attributes of the God of Classical Theism.***