

Why should I even care if God exists?

While the ancients could not keep themselves from examining the supernatural, contemporary Western thought often has people wondering whether the existence of God even matters. “I’m doing just fine without God,” people surmise. But God might be more important than appears at first glance.

Have you ever imagined what it would be like if someone you loved was never born? What experiences would no longer be a part of your history? What influences might have been lost? What joys and sorrows would be missed? Thoughts like these are not foreign to the human psyche, and so it is not completely out of the question to consider what life might be like—not just for you, but for all humanity—if there was not just the absence of a single person, but the absence of God. Such a mind experiment might even give impetus to care if God exists.

Human Reasoning

Just to read what you have so far has required you to use reason in order to understand what was written. You also had to trust in your reasoning skills. But is your own reasoning something that warrants any confidence if there is no God? The common story for those who do not believe in God is that life in the cosmos came about by an unguided process and furthermore that this process is continually changing life forms on the planet in substantial ways. In the framework of this story, there was a time when reasoning skills like we have today did not exist in the minds of our ancestors. Furthermore, there will be a time when the reason that *Homo sapiens* use today will not continue in our descendants. Now, if this is so, is human reasoning something in which we can have any confidence? As even Darwin himself pondered: if today’s reasoning will be gone tomorrow, trust in our reasoned conclusions (even our conclusion in the inexistence of God) is in jeopardy.¹

Free Will

Those who believe in God have always recognized the existence of human free will, even if at times it is restrained or guided by the sovereign will of God. Believers recognize that God himself is an undetermined being and in creating humanity in his image granted us with a certain ability to make undetermined choices in the time and space in which we live. Those who do not believe in God do not have the luxury, however, of believing in free will. Neo-Darwinism is the current best explanation of development of biological life forwarded by those who are atheists. As indicated above, it is the idea that life has come about through a string of unguided biological changes. Furthermore, these changes have brought about people who due to their genetic make-up cannot help but respond in certain ways given surrounding stimuli. This is why Sam Harris, a prolific writer and proponent of atheism states: “Free will is an illusion. Our wills are simply not of our own making. Thoughts and intentions emerge from background causes of which we are unaware and over which we exert no conscious control.”² What Harris is saying is: no God, no free will. Our every actions are determined by our genetic history.

Morality

It is not uncommon for people to question the co-existence of God and evil, but when such questions are asked doubt is nearly always placed in the existence of God and not in the existence of evil. But if there is no God, is it right to even speak of evil? The answer to this question would seem to be no. Free will is a dubious human concept for those who do not believe in God, and without free choice it is difficult to see how as individuals any of our actions could be deemed wrong. When a man rapes a woman or a when a woman embezzles another’s fortune or even when one ethnic group “cleanses” another, all we can say if there is no God is that such behavior is merely the way of the wild. We do not

call one lion attacking another lion evil or wrong, we simply say it is the way of nature. Take God out of the picture, and it is hard to conclude anything different for any kind of human behavior.

Human Equality

The United States constitution says that all men have been created equal. Indeed, this concept has been a major tenant of Western democracy. Whether man or woman, black or white, rich or poor, smart or dumb, all people should be given equal protection under the law for the fundamental reason that people are of equal standing. But is this really true in a world without God? The unguided evolutionary picture tells us that all have not been created equal. Some of us are more fit to survive and propagate than others. Many cringe at the proponents of eugenics who were so prevalent in the pre-WWII era, but if we live in a world without God maybe they were right. Maybe people aren't really created equal and we should act accordingly.

Purpose

Some time ago I was told a story about prisoners of war who were forced to move a large mound of rocks. Once the mound was moved, they were told to move it back to its original location. The work was physically painstaking, but what made matters unbearably worse was that there was no purpose to their activity. Moving the rocks was meaningless. An existence without God can be argued to be just as meaningless. As human masses of matter that 1) have come about without any external engagement, 2) are responding in pre-determined ways, and 3) will deteriorate into thoughtless matter at death, there is little to ground the concepts of meaning or purpose relative to human activity. Without God, we simply do what we must do because of what has happened in our genetic past and any meaning we conjure up for our existence is just a "useful fiction" that keeps us going.

Love

Humanity longs for love. It sings songs about love. It risks greatly in pursuit of love. It has known countless broken hearts in unrequited love. For many, life without love is not a life worth living. Yet when we consider life without God, one must seriously doubt a notion of love that resembles anything a poet would write about. Indeed, love in a Godless world is reduced to nothing more than a chemical reaction akin to the fizz created when baking soda and vinegar are combined. When we say we love our children, we are not really saying they are of great worth and that we adore them for any reason other than the reaction they produce in us. Similarly, if a man tells his wife that he loves her, he is not telling her there is anything going on other than an uncontrollable chemical reaction that causes certain responses in his body and brain.

Concluding that life without God equals a life without rationality, free will, morality, human equality, purpose, or love, might seem to go too far. But these conclusions are not just those of God-believers examining the atheistic worldview, they are also the views of respected and thoughtful atheists. For example, famed atheist Richard Dawkins writes:

In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, and other people are going to get lucky; and you won't find any rhyme or reason to it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good.³

William Provine of Cornell University echoes these sentiments:

Let me summarize my views...There are no gods, no purposes, no goal-directed forces of any kind. There is no life after death. When I die, I am absolutely certain I am going to be dead. That's the end for me. There is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning to life, and no free will for humans, either.⁴

I know there is a growing number of people who doubt the existence of God. They may think belief in him to be a quaint (perhaps even dangerous) superstition. But I have also found that few have thought out the consequences of a Godless world. Does it really make sense to say that our intuitions towards human reasoning, morality, free will, human equality, purpose, and love are false? The question asked here is: why should I even care if God exists? The best answer I give is that you should care because God grounds most everything that makes life worth living.

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¹ Darwin wrote: "*With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy.*" Charles Darwin to W. Graham, July 3, 1881, in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, ed. Francis Darwin (1897; repr., Boston: Elibron, 2005), 1:285.

² Sam Harris, *Free Will* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 5.

³ Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Book, 1995), 133.

⁴ "Darwinism: Science or Naturalistic Philosophy?: A Debate between William B. Provine and Phillip E. Johnson at Stanford University, April 30, 1994" *Origins Research*, vol 16, no .1, <http://www.arn.org/docs/orpages/or161/161main.htm> (accessed March 4, 2013).