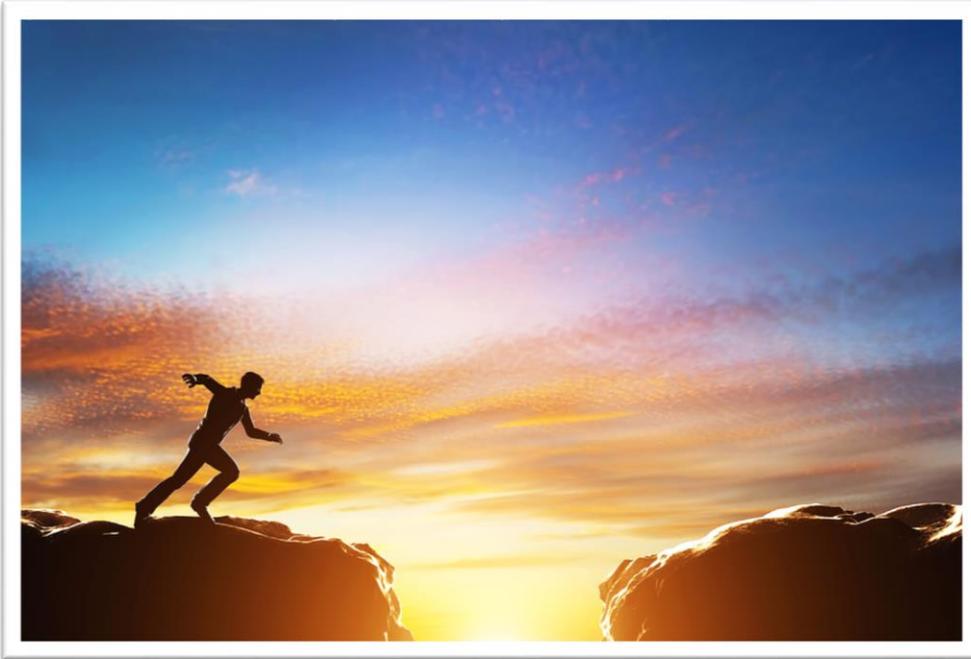


FRIENDLY DEBATE WITH ATHEISTS



This is a debate about atheism with some folks from England. It took place over several hours in response to my post "Choosing a Religion." No minds were changed but I like the way it ended. I have removed last names and made some minor corrections.

SCOTT HILBORN

First of all, you are a Theist (you believe there is a God or gods) or you are an A-theist (you believe there is no God).

If you are an atheist, you believe that you and I are six chemical elements (calcium, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, and phosphorus) that have managed somehow to organize themselves to walk and talk. But that is it. When you are dead, you are dead. Like a candle snuffed out. Extinction. Any meaning in life for the atheist comes solely from his own construction, because in his mind, there is no REAL meaning to life. Frankly, I have never met an atheist with that extreme a commitment. To me it seems like a philosophy of despair.

If you are a Theist, then you have two choices. You are a Monotheist (one God) or a Polytheist (many gods, like Hinduism). If you are a Monotheist, then you are down to three choices: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

The most prominent figures of the monotheistic religions are Moses, Mohammed, and Jesus Christ.

Of those three --

Only one claimed to be the Son of God.

Only one claimed to forgive sins.

Only one claimed to be THE way to God.

Only one rose from the dead. His name is Jesus.

Obviously, I vote for Jesus Christ. I have put all my eggs in his basket. If he is wrong, then I am wrong. But I have complete confidence in Jesus.

CHRIS No. All an atheist believes is that there is no creator. That is it. There is no evidence to suggest there is a god of any kind.

SCOTT HILBORN With all respect then what are you as a human being if not those six elements? And what is your purpose? And what evidence do you have that there is no creator? Atheism is an honorable point of view if the evidence shows there is no creator. What evidence did you have in mind that there is no creator? There is no absolute proof that there is a creator, but there are many things that can be used as evidence.

CHRIS Point by point...

Atheism is term used by people that do not believe in a god. That is it...Stating elements or purpose as a human being has nothing to do with being an atheist.

Evidence that there is a creator lays at the feet of the person saying there is. The burden of proof lays with the theist.

Science, reason and logic give answers to the things we know. Faith relies on one book and stories. A bit silly don't you think.

SCOTT HILBORN Well, I would like to propose that my faith is in an historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps he lied or was mistaken about who he was. But I have put my full trust in him.

Atheism, as I understand it, is a statement of belief. One believes that there is no God. Now I can certainly provide evidences for there being a God. What evidences can you provide for there not being a God? I hope this does not sound like I'm attacking you. I'm sure you are a fine and thoughtful person. But I do think it matters very much what we base our faith on. Atheism is a commitment to a point of view. Again, what evidence is there for that point of view?

SCOTT HILBORN By the way, I have to step out for a couple hours. But I would enjoy continuing our conversation.

CHRIS My evidence is that you can't prove your statement for there being a god...as I said the burden of proof is yours...please provide your evidence...

SCOTT HILBORN Well, I can provide no proof but I can provide evidence. The testimony of millions who can point to a completely changed life through Jesus. This was my own experience too. The beauty and order of creation. The religious impulsive almost all human beings have had in all of history. The continued existence of the Jews. The continued existence of the Bible. If you study the history of the Bible it is really an amazing history. The testimony of eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. The continued appearance of miracles of healing. Admittedly, some are questionable, but some undoubtedly are genuine. For persons of faith, what we call providential circumstances.

By the way, have you ever read the four Gospels in the New Testament? I fully admit that for someone who does not want to believe, no evidence will be sufficient. And I also admit there is no absolute proof. But these are evidences of God to come to my mind. Do you have any evidence that there is no God? If I were an atheist, I could certainly point to cancer, terrorism, the other tragedies and miseries of life, the randomness of life, the feeling of alienation many people have from one another and themselves, the seeming lack of purpose. Death itself would seem to point to there not being a God. But how about you? What are your evidences?

CHRIS Ok...

I'll do my best to cover what you said is your evidence.

The bible... I'm guessing you are a Christian or a branch of Christianity. The bible is not one

book it's a combination of a few, all written at different times in a land that was half illiterate at the time of writing.

The fact the bible exists has no relevance to back up a claim for a god.

The bible itself is a pretty strange book as there is contradiction after contradiction. yet people believe they can live their lives by it.

Jews...again just because a group of Jewish people exist does no way prove a god. How?

Miracles and healing (bible stories)..all hearsay and fiction until proved otherwise. When was the last miracle that you saw and could prove wasn't something none paranormal?

Personal claims are not proof or evidence of anything.

Again I do not need to provide evidence of a paranormal entity that you claim exists...that's for you to do.

If I claimed I could walk through walls... you would expect me to prove it ... I wouldn't expect you to disprove such a bold and ridiculous claim.

SCOTT HILBORN I'm curious. What do you consider to be the meaning of your life?

SCOTT HILBORN And yes, I am a Presbyterian minister, but most importantly a follower of Jesus.

CHRIS To live it well...enjoy it...help others...be yourself...have good morals...accept people who aren't perfect...

SCOTT HILBORN Me too, Chris. If you ever want to talk further on this subject, or any other, I'd be honored to hear from you.

CHRIS I'm glad you agree with what makes a good human. Everyone can be moral...and you don't need a god or bible to help.

MICK There are no eye witness accounts of Jesus in the bible. All are at least third hand accounts written down at the earliest 100 years after the events portrayed.

SCOTT HILBORN Well, at the risk of sounding like a know it all, that is simply not true. All the NT documents, except Revelation, were written between 40 and 70 AD. Revelation was written around 90 AD. Matthew and John were eyewitnesses. Luke interviewed the eyewitnesses, as did Paul, who himself had a vision of the resurrected Jesus.

MICK But Mathew and John aren't the authors of the gospels in their names as for Luke and Paul it was second hand them hearing it and third hand when they passed it on which is what I said. We have only his word that he had the said vision which is evidence of nothing.

CHRIS Who's to say that one guy didn't write it all and just say others did??

SCOTT HILBORN Hardly any scholar doubts that Matthew and John are the authors. Have you actually read the New Testament? If not, I encourage you to do so. Unless one has already chosen to be against what they find, I think most people will find it very believable. And those who study textual criticism, the authenticity of ancient documents, where the religious or secular, all agree on the accuracy and authenticity of the documents themselves. There are vastly more ancient copies to attest to those documents than there are for any other works of antiquity. Obviously, having correct documents does not make them true. But again, I think that most people who read it with an open mind, find it very believable.

CHRIS I have an issue with anything printed in the bible.
Genesis states...god said let there be light...then on the third day created the sun...Noah's ark....really??

CHRIS To base your whole life around one book that is so old that no one can know for sure which bits are true or made up seem ludicrous.
Faith based living will always fall short...

MICK Most scholars don't think they wrote it at all. The gospels can't even agree on the story there are differences and omissions in all of them. I have read the bible I like to assess the evidence before I decide my views on anything.

SCOTT HILBORN Well, I just don't know what to say. When you say "most scholars," who are you referring to? The scholars I am referring to are represented in Catholic, Protestant, and even Jewish seminaries.

RIC You keep saying that word Atheist.
I do not think it means what you think it means.

SCOTT HILBORN Go for it. What is your understanding of what it means?

RIC Precisely what the word means.

atheism

[ey-thee-iz-uh m]

noun

the doctrine or belief that there is no God.

disbelief in the existence of a supreme being or beings.

LAURA And where does spiritualist come into it. There's holes in your logic

RIC And that means none of them. Yours is no different to me than the other estimated 4000 that mankind has postulated to exist

CHRIS Anything that can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence...

CHRIS The issue is peoples need to believe in something the takes away the responsibility to think for one's self..

It's easy to say .."god had other plans for me"... "the good lord deemed it so"...

Truth is people need a crutch... that's a really sad way to live

SCOTT HILBORN Hi Rick! In my opinion, atheism is an honorable point of view. Unlike agnosticism which usually is someone's excuse for "quit bothering me!" The atheist has come to a point of conviction that there is no God. At that point though, since there is no creative mind behind you and me, you are then left with the fact that we are essentially those six chemical elements. Somehow, by random occurrence, those six elements have organized to walk and talk. If that is the case then, life would only be what we believe it to be. What do you think?

SCOTT HILBORN Laura – I am not well-versed in spiritualist thought. Do you believe in a creator?

SCOTT HILBORN Hi Laura. My response is a little bit down the list.

SCOTT HILBORN Well, Chris, I agree with you. Humans are designed to need to live with a crutch. Which is why Jesus said unless you enter the kingdom of God like a child, you will not enter it at all. Now, living in conscious dependence upon God, as I try to do every day, in no way takes away my responsibility to make wise and moral choices.

LAURA I don't believe in God.. . But I'm spiritual. ... therefore believe there is more to us than just elements and energy. You're also forgetting though that these elements took millions of years to 'walk and talk' as you put it so what may have started as random became evolution to best support the progress of all living life. Not everyone needs a crutch... but if they do... and it makes them a better person... then why does it matter what people believe.

RIC It's not a random occurrence though, it was an inevitable consequence of the probability of chemical reaction. Any number of chemical elements will eventually combine in such a way that will be more successful in existing longer than the rest. That is how the physical properties of anything comes about long enough to be observable. It doesn't take much after you accept that mathematical and physical fact to see how evolution is an inevitable consequence.

If you deny these facts then you are no better than a flat-earther or conspiracy theorist.

LAURA Ric you say it so eloquently for this time of night... Glad Barry is asleep ha ha

SCOTT HILBORN My point really was not intended to get into evolution. But going with your point, the physical facts are an inevitable consequence of what? What initiated the big bang? And why? But the point I'm trying to make is that your own sense of consciousness, would also be simply a result of the interactions of your constituent elements. With no genuine meaning. And to take it to a crass point, when you die, do you expect extinction?

I forget how late it must be over there for you!

SCOTT HILBORN Hi Laura! I know it's late where you are so feel free to respond in the morning if you want. As a Christian, when I hear the word "spiritual," the New Testament speaks in terms of spirits. Dreadful and benign. I'm not trying to fight with you, but would it not be possible, if you believe in spirits, that one of them could be the Creator?

CHRIS the truth is we can't be 100% sure what made life and everything else...we use science to give us the best possible chance to get to the right answer.

Just because we can't explain how we got here for certain...doesn't mean we should make things up... Scott Hilborn... why do you believe your version of religion ...is it pot luck you were born in the US...a predominantly Christian place...if you were born in the middle east. You would most likely be Muslim...what does that say about all religions, they are unsound by their very geographic placement.

RIC I'm humble enough to not expect my consciousness to exist past the functioning of my physical body. I find it the height of arrogance to believe otherwise frankly.

You're asking for answers to questions that can only be postulated about with our current understanding of physics but this will change. Science knows that it doesn't know everything, that's why it keeps moving forward and develops. The theistic mind often sees science as being disingenuous because it casts things in stone and refuses to evolve when new evidence is presented to it. In this respect it is anathema to the theistic mindset.

I have constant wonder in my heart and mind for the world around me. I have abiding love for my fellow human beings. I have morals and goodness without a daddy figure looking over my shoulder.

I don't need a book to tell me what is right, or the threat of damnation to force me to do it. I just need an understanding of other people's pains, emotions, desires and feelings.

SCOTT HILBORN Hi Chris! I grant you that our geographical place of birth has a lot to do with choice of religion. I grew up being taken to church. But my own experience was that I rejected it when I went to college. Sometime later, and a time of real pain, I cried out to God.

All I can say is that I felt his spiritual presence enter into me at that point in time. For me, Chris, I have arranged my life around following Jesus Christ. It is not just choosing to believe a set of idle thoughts (like, wouldn't it be nice if elves were real) but a real deliberate choosing of a lifestyle. Are there hypocrites in the church? You bet. But if you think about it, there are hypocrites everywhere.

CHRIS I'm not actually an atheist...I'm an anti-theist. Which means I think all religions are a bad thing. They dumb down the populations. They wreak havoc in the middle east and breed hate everywhere its listened to.

Christianity...Islam...Judaism....every one of them has a history of fear, hate and lies...

It's awful...

SCOTT HILBORN Hi Ric! Somewhere it dropped off my post, but I am a Presbyterian minister. My father was a scientist, a full professor of electrical and computer engineering. At its best, science is the effort to discover the truth. I agree, some Christians find science threatening. But a lot of us do not. My personal conviction is that the truth of science and the truth of God are the same truth. But if one's idea of believing in God is at the same level as believing in leprechauns, what difference does it make?

We deal with that a lot in the church in America. People have a notional belief in God, but it doesn't seem to affect the way they live. I very deliberately try to organize my life around the belief that Jesus Christ is God and living with me and in me. I'm enjoying our conversation. And I appreciate getting to interact with you.

SCOTT HILBORN Chris, I grant you that the history of Christianity is quite spotty. On the other hand, if you do a Google search of contributions of Christianity to Western civilization, there are some pretty impressive things there. Though I am a Presbyterian minister, I really am more interested in promoting the following of Jesus Christ personally, than I am promoting the Christian religion.

CHRIS The character of Jesus in the bible is as "Spotty" as the teachings and actions if the Christian religion.

So you have a guy that believed he was the son of "god"...in today's society he would be considered mentally ill. Why did he stay in the Middle East. Why did he not visit China, Japan, Australia ...Europe even...

SCOTT HILBORN Ric, why do you believe it's arrogant to think you will exist beyond the grave? We're not talking about a meritorious gain of heaven. In Christian belief, it is as sinners that we entrust ourselves to Jesus. He himself said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." No one is good enough to merit heaven. What if it turns out that we cannot stop existing, even if we wanted to?

RIC You might find my occupation strange seeing what my beliefs are but I make and restore stained glass windows. I'm an artist and a craftsman and that is how I approach my work. I have read the Bible, torah and Koran as well as studied many other forms of belief.

Nothing in my work, none of the vicars, pastors or priests with whom I converse on a regular basis, have ever persuaded me that there is a God, or even a need for one. There are the majority of people that are good people. They would be good without God though. There are also those though that use the Christian belief as a mask and a reason to belittle and abuse their fellow man. In this respect organized religion is unique. I find it to be a control system and nothing more.

You are entitled to believe anything you choose to of course and I know that evangelical belief calls you to bear witness and convert others, but that is where my tolerance finishes.

SCOTT HILBORN Well, it is true, that the organized church can be a system of oppression. And yes, it is true, I would like everybody to find what I have found. But that is far as I push it. I've enjoyed talking with you.

CHRIS I must agree ... do as you want, but when religious beliefs affect me or mine ...I have a problem...

Terror attacks

Child molestation by priests

Homophobia

Abortions

To name but a few...

SCOTT HILBORN Chris -- yes, the list of atrocities can go on and on. Here is an interesting thing I read though about pedophilia in the priesthood that made sense to me. Some of these young men went INTO the priesthood, hoping that would cure them from their desires. No excuse of course, but somehow that made sense to me. I love your point about Jesus claiming to be the Son of God must have meant he was deranged. I seriously doubt that if I lived then, I could have accepted him. After all, who does he think he is? C.S. Lewis (is he as famous there as he is here?) made a quote I really like. This is approximately it: "Either he was a lunatic, on the level of a poached egg, or a deceiver on the level of a devil, or he was who he said he was -- God in the flesh."

SCOTT HILBORN One more thing, Ric. Within the last five years, my congregation had stained glass windows installed. Do you get to work on some really ancient glass windows? If so, that must be really cool.

RIC I find it arrogant to believe that I am any more special than anyone else. That the act of acknowledging a mythical saviour will grant me eternal bliss? That's arrogant too.

I'm already unique now, and special I hope to those that might know and love me.

I believe that human comprehension of time and the processes of the universe is limited to say the least. Our constituent parts will live on in other things but our minds will not unless it's in the memories and experience of us that others have.

I regularly work on windows that are two/three hundred years old. The oldest were made in 1250-ish.

RIC I enjoyed our conversation and the respect shown. It's not often the case when talking to evangelical Christians.

CHRIS Agreed ...