

## GOD: MYTH OR REALITY?

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### ABSTRACT

This essay will contain the most important facts, theories and hypothesis that prove if God is myth or reality. It has always been a lively debate topic – who created this world and whether God had anything to do with it or not? If present day science cannot prove it, does God really exist? This has been discussed with equal enthusiasm in all communities and religions. Modern science has really started to question God's existence nowadays because of the development of all this high technology and also because of the increased human's rational and self conscious thinking. On one hand, there are millions of believers including philosophers and some scientists who believe in God's hand and providence. On the other hand, there are numerous rational atheists in all parts of social communities who believe that only whatever is visible or scientifically verifiable is true. So does your faith in God leads you to the point where you question His existence? I have chosen to write about this subject because of this universal question. In this essay I will try to cover every angle of both sides of the debate and to show you what majority of people think about this topic and which side's arguments and theories are more acceptable

**Keywords :** God, religion, atheism, science, arguments

### REZIME

Ovaj rad će sadržati najznačajnije činjenice, teorije i hipoteze koje dokazuju da li je Bog stvaran ili ne . Ko je stvorio ovaj svet i da li je bog imao udela u tome je oduvek bila živa i interesanta tema za debatu. Ako današnja nauka ne može da ovo dokaže, da li Bog stvarno postoji ? O ovome je raspravljano s jednakim entuzijazmom u svim zajednicama i religijama . Moderna nauka je u današnje vreme stvarno počela da ispituje postojanje Boga zbog razvitka tehnologije i takodje zbog povećanog racionalnog i svesnog razmišljanja ljudi. Na jednoj strani su milioni vernika uključujući filozofe i neke naučnike koji veruju u božju ruku i njegovo providjenje , a na drugoj strani su mnogobrojni racionalni ateisti u svim delovima društva koji veruju da je samo ono sto je vidljivo ili naučno dokazano stvarno . Da li vas vasa vera u Boga vodi to tačke kada se zapitate o njegovom postojanju ? Ja sam izabrao da pisem o ovoj temi zbog ovog generalnog pitanja . U ovom radu ću pokušati da pokrijem svaki ugao obeju strana ove debate i da vam pokažem sta većina misli o ovoj temi i čiji su argumenti i teorije prihvatljiviji .

Ključne reči: Bog, religija, ateizam, nauka, argumenti

## God – generally speaking

The existence - or lack of - God is one of humanity's fundamental questions. Since the first birth, the first sunrise, the first death, humans have been trying to explain the world around them. The whole of human existence, in the end, comes down to this: **Is there God? What is God?** Surely there is a big difference between the Christian God, Jehovah and the Greek God Zeus. If we were talking specifically about any one of the gods ever worshipped by man, it would be a much easier question. However, that's not what we have. And since this will be an essay with a lot of „God“ in it, we all better have our definitions straight.

Modern man's concepts of God are many and varied. Children tend to imagine an old man with a white beard. Many adults regard God as an invisible force or a mental concept or as all humanity, the universe, or even oneself. However one thing is definitely certain, in almost all religions God is the spirit, being, or force that has created and controls the universe, especially the god of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish religions. Although many have tried, it is really hard to define God and we cannot be certain that any of them have succeeded.

In this essay I will try to briefly inform you about religions from all over the world and about the essentials of why so many people believe in God nowadays. On the other hand, I will try to show you what Atheism is all about and why it is spreading around the world so fast. If you are interested in learning which side has better and stronger arguments and whether you are an atheist, believer or you are simply trying to inform yourself about this subject, then keep reading and hopefully this essay will help you. In addition, I will also focus on doing some surveys so I can find out current beliefs of youth in my community.



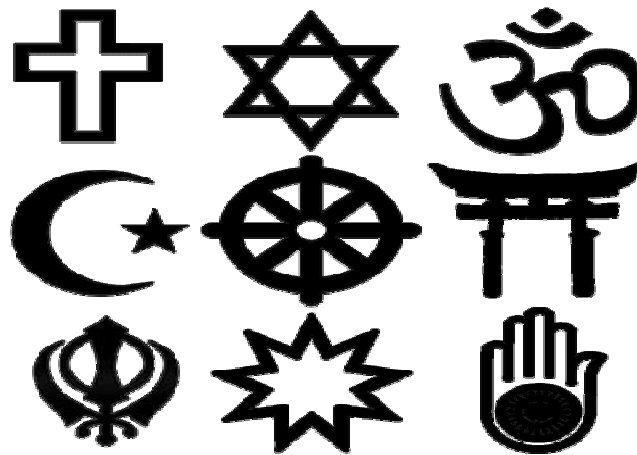
## Belief

With the beginning of mankind people also begin to believe in something high above all of us which has supernatural powers. Our beliefs come from what we hear, feel, see, understand, assume. At first this was a kind of solution for some things which our ancestors couldn't explain, as time was passing by people have started to pick up beliefs, they were seared on our subconscious mind with strong emotions. People of that time felt the need to believe in something (this need is also present now and it always will be) especially when times got

hard. At these times we will always need something we can tell our deepest concerns and fears to. This is the main reason which led to our increased need to believe and to more conscious believing in God, and what is more, one of the essential reasons why religions have been created.

For every given proposition, every person either has or lacks the mental attitude that it is true — there is no middle ground between the presence or absence of a belief. In the case of gods, everyone either has a belief that at least one god of some sort exists or they lack any such belief.

We all also have many beliefs which we are not consciously aware of. There may even be beliefs which some people never consciously think about. As a consequence of believing, if you believe something is true, you must be willing to act as if it were true. You should not hide or be ashamed of your beliefs because they represent you and your character. If you are unwilling to act as though it were true, you cannot really claim to believe it. This is why actions can matter much more than words. Beliefs are important because behavior is important and your behavior depends on your beliefs. Everything you do can be traced back to beliefs you hold about the world — everything from brushing your teeth to your future career. Because of all these reasons you should realise how important our beliefs are for ourselves and our character !



## Religion

What is the definition of religion? The definition of religion is not easy to find. There are many interpretations of what defines a religion but not one that can be said to be the most accurate. In dictionaries, religion is defined as “any specific system of belief, worship, or conduct that prescribes certain responses to the existence (or non-existence) and character of God. This and most of the definitions are not really accurate because of, for example, atheism is called a religion but the belief denies any power other than man. Native Americans believe their spiritual beliefs are a necessary part of their existence and cannot be separated from their life experience.

The origin of religion can generally be traced to the ancient Near East and classified in three basic categories: polytheistic, pantheistic and monotheistic.

**Polytheism** (a belief in many gods) is thought to have originated with Hinduism in about 2500 BC. Polytheism was also the religion of many other ancient cultures, including Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Greece and Rome. The ancient polytheistic belief systems viewed gods as being in control of all natural events such as rainfall, harvests and fertility. Generally,

polytheistic cultures believed in sacrifices to appease their gods. The Greeks and Romans developed polytheism to a highly structured pantheon of gods and goddesses.

**Pantheism** (a belief that all is God) prevailed in numerous ancient cultures. The belief that the universe itself was divine was typified in the Animism beliefs of the African and American Indian cultures, the later Egyptian religion under the Pharaohs, and Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism in the cultures of the Far East. Generally, pantheism is the principle that god is everything, and everything is god. Therefore, nature is also part of god. So they must be in harmony with nature. They say that mankind is no different than any other animal. Which means we must live in harmony with them, understand them, and learn from them. The core of this religion focusing on the relationship between mankind and the elements of nature.

**Monotheism** (a belief in one God) is the foundation of the Judeo-Christian-Muslim line of religions, God began revealing Himself to the world through the nation of Israel. The Jewish Scriptures record the journey of the Israelites from slaves in Egypt to the "promised land" under the leadership of Moses. During the period of the Roman Empire, Jesus Christ was born as the long-awaited Messiah. The ministry of Jesus ended with His crucifixion and resurrection. After Christ's ascension into Heaven, the Christian church grew in his name and the New Testament was written. About 600 years later, Muhammad began preaching in Mecca. Muhammad believed he was the ultimate prophet of God, and his teachings became the precepts of Islam as recorded in the Qur'an.

These are some of the most important dates in history of all religions:

Important Dates in History of all religions:

- c. 2000 BC: Time of Abraham, the patriarch of Israel.
- c. 1200 BC: Time of Moses, the Hebrew leader of the Exodus.
- c. 1100 - 500 BC: Hindus compile their holy texts, the Vedas.
- c. 563 - 483 BC: Time of Buddha, founder of Buddhism.
- c. 551 - 479 BC: Time of Confucius, founder of Confucianism.
- c. 200 BC: The Hindu book, *Bhagavad Gita*, is written.
- c. 2 to 4 BC - 32 AD: Time of Jesus Christ, the Messiah and founder of Christianity.
- c. 32 AD: The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- c. 40 - 90 AD: The New Testament is written by the followers of Jesus Christ.
- c. 570 - 632 AD: Time of Muhammad, who records the Qur'an as the basis of Islam.

In today's time religions have also become some of the most powerful 'organisations' in the world. These are major religions of the world if looked by the number of their followers.

Number of followers to the world's major religions, in millions:

<i>Christian</i>	1,980
<i>Islam</i>	1,300
<i>Hindu</i>	900

**Advantages and disadvantages of religion**

Is religion a force for good or for evil? There is evidence both ways, and I am not really qualified to balance the pluses and minuses.

Certainly religion provides comfort to many people, and perhaps gets some to behave more ethically than they might otherwise. Religions have inspired many great works of art,

architecture, and music. They also have sponsored charitable, medical, and educational institutions. Another positive effect of religion is that it helps keep people from feeling fear of the unknown. There are those people who love religion because they cannot bear to think that this world was not made by a creator, or God.

Steven Weinberg said : “With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil — but for good people to do evil — that takes religion.”

This is unfortunately true up to a point. There are also bad sides of a religion, actually many of them. People fight and die over religious holy places, some of which are claimed by more than one religion, as in Jerusalem and India. There are also some large-scale horrors to which religion contributed: wars, pogroms, crusades, jihads, persecutions, inquisitions, witch hunts. We have seen these things in old history and some continue today. Religion has served as justification, if not the real reason, for slavery, colonialism, and even cruelty to animals. Regarding negative effects of religion on the human race, the most lasting effect of religion on the human race is that it has been the cause of almost every war since the beginning of time.

To sum up, these are some *what if* questions we can pose (but not answer):

-What would the world be like now if there had never been the Crusades, or the Spanish Inquisition?

-How different would the United States be today if there had never been religious persecutions in other countries, which sent so many of our ancestors there?

-What would the UK be like if Henry VIII hadn't broken so bitterly with the Catholic Church?

-What would India-Pakistan be like if there had been no religion-based partition?

-How would the world be different if there had not been the religious motivations of people like Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, and Albert Schweitzer?

-Where would scholarship be now if churches hadn't founded such great universities as Harvard and Oxford?

-Would we have the music of Johann Sebastian Bach if he hadn't been employed by the church?

Although there are millions of people who are followers of some type of religion throughout the world, it is important to remember that there are both positive and negative effects on the human race because of religion, and everyone should be respected for their belief system and not be judged or persecuted because of it.

In a perfect world, that would be the case; but as we all know, this is not a perfect world.

### **Definition of Atheism**

Atheism is a complex term to define, and many definitions fail to capture the range of positions an atheist can hold. Perhaps the most obvious meaning to many people now is the absence or rejection of a belief in a God, or gods. The word atheism comes from the Greek adjective *atheos*, which means 'without, not', and *theos*, 'God'. Michael Martin, a leading atheist philosopher, defines atheism entirely in terms of a belief. For him, atheism is the disbelief in God, and agnosticism is the lack of either belief or disbelief in God. There are more different definitions of atheism but this one is the simplest and the easiest to understand, so we will stick to it. It is strange that atheism would be so difficult to understand, but it must be - otherwise, there wouldn't be so many arguments over what it means, what it entails, and what significance it has for the society.

## **Facts about atheism**

What is atheism? How can I be an atheist? What does it take for a person to become an atheist? Is there a secret handshake or something?

These are some common question about atheism. The answer is simple:

Step One: Don't believe in any gods.

That's it, there are no steps two, three, or four. All you have to do is not believe in the existence of any gods. All those scepticisms about atheism are NOT true, for example:

You don't have to deny the existence of any gods!

You don't have to assert that no gods exist!

You don't have to be certain that no gods exist!

You don't have to join the Communist Party!

You don't have to be rebelling against your family!

You don't have to stop celebrating Christmas!

There are lots of things which people imagine are part of being an atheist, but definitely are not. Atheism is nothing more or less than the absence of belief in gods. There are only two options available for everyone: either a belief in the existence of some sort of god is present, or no such belief is present. That exhausts all the logical possibilities. This means that everyone is either a theist or an atheist. There is no "middle ground". It is either there or it is not. What you do after you arrive at not believing in any gods may also be difficult. You do not have to do anything more to be an atheist, but this does not mean that there is nothing at all left to do. Being an atheist is easy — all that it requires is not believing in any gods. Existing as an atheist, though, is not always easy because so many people think so poorly of atheists. In more secular societies where lots of people are atheists, existing as an atheist will be easier because there is less pressure telling them that being an atheist is immoral, unpatriotic, or dangerous. In more religious societies, the increased pressure will make existing as an atheist very difficult for some. Many people may start treating you differently simply because you do not believe in their gods anymore. You may have to be concerned about whether knowledge of your atheism might lead to discrimination against you at school, for example.



Why are people becoming atheists ?

There are as many reasons for being an atheist as there are atheists: the road to atheism tends to be very personal and individual, based upon the specific circumstances of a person's life, experiences, and attitudes.

It is not unusual for an atheist to have been raised in a religious household and to have grown up living with the assumption that their religious tradition represented the One True Faith in the One True God. However, after learning more about other religious traditions, this same person may adopt a much more critical attitude towards their own religion and even religion generally, eventually that same person can reject not only that religion but also belief in the existence of any gods. Another possible reason for atheism may originate in bad experiences with a religion. Many atheists find their way to disbelief through science. Over the centuries science has come to offer explanations of aspects of our world which were once the exclusive domain of religion. It is not ultimately up to the atheist to justify atheism; rather, it is up to the theist to explain why belief in a god is reasonable. Thus, a better question than “why are people atheists?” would perhaps be “why are people theists?”

Today, atheism is spreading rapidly across the world. One of the reasons is the new technology, especially internet that enables people from around the world to communicate with one another. That increasingly allows people to realise that they are not the only atheists and help them in the way they might have not imagined before.

### A survey

I have conducted a survey and interviewed around 60 people within 15 to 18 years of age. I have asked them questions about religion and their religious beliefs. The questions were :

Do you believe in God?

What factors were relevant in your decision to believe in God? (\* answer only if you do believe)

Why don't you believe in God?(\*answer only if you do not believe in God)

Do you regularly go to church?

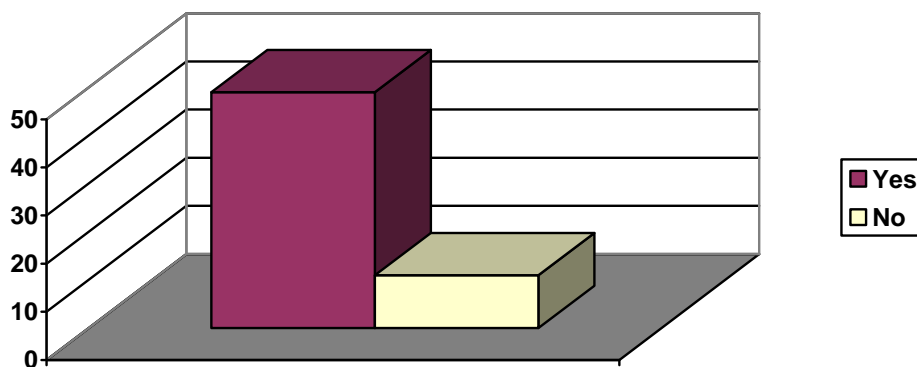
Do you know the Ten commandments ?

Do you know what the word atheism means ?

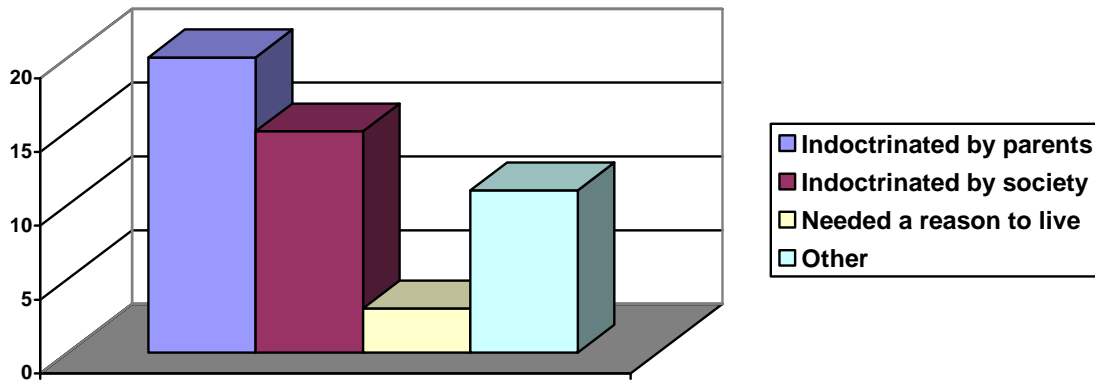
In this survey I have wanted to find out the basic facts about youth's belief in God in my community and their knowledge about some general religious things. The survey's finding was not surprising having in mind the fact that people live in a religious environment.

These were the answers :

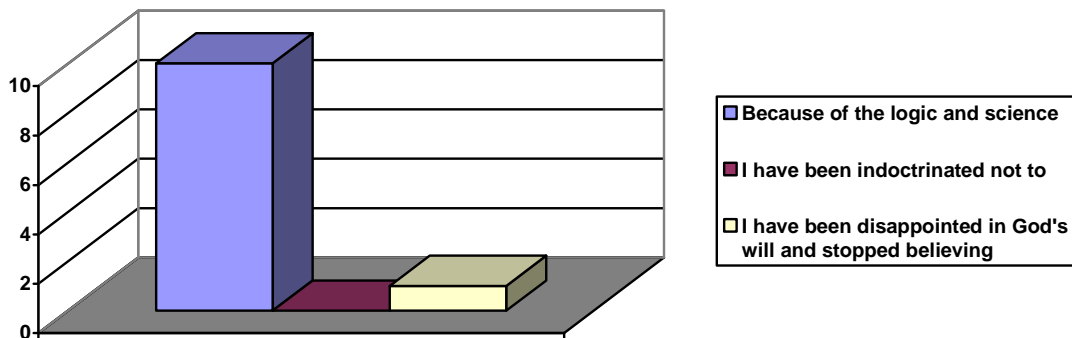
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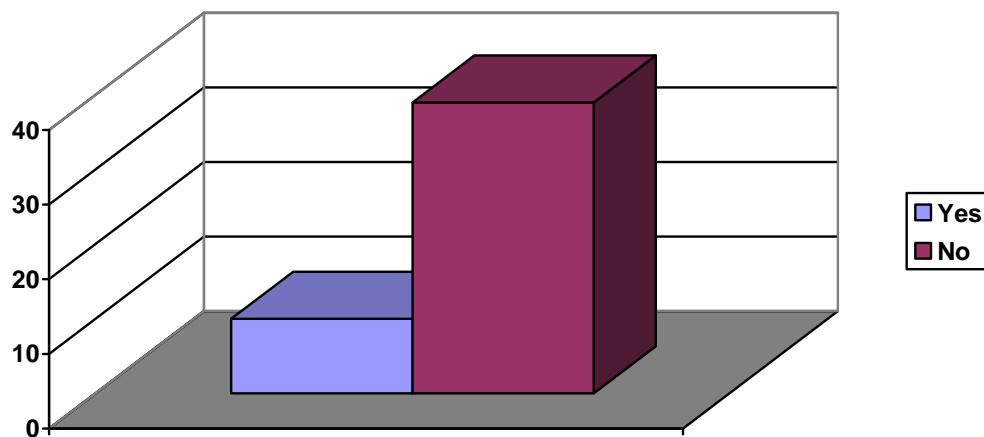
What factors were relevant in your decision to believe in God? (\* answer only if you do believe)



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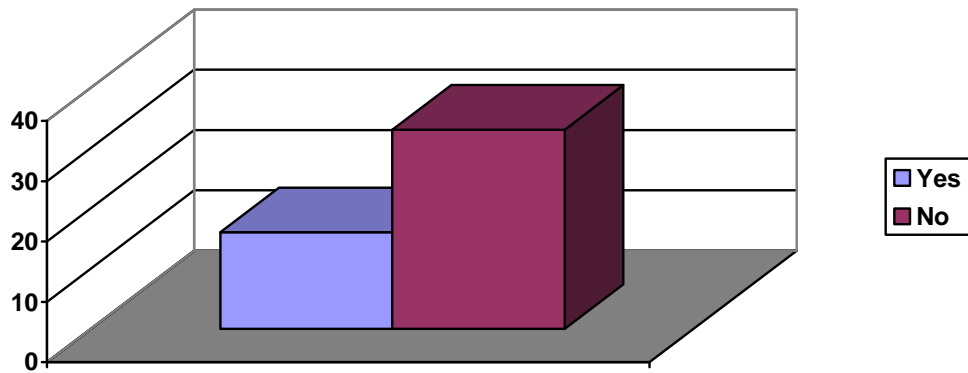


Do you regularly go to church?

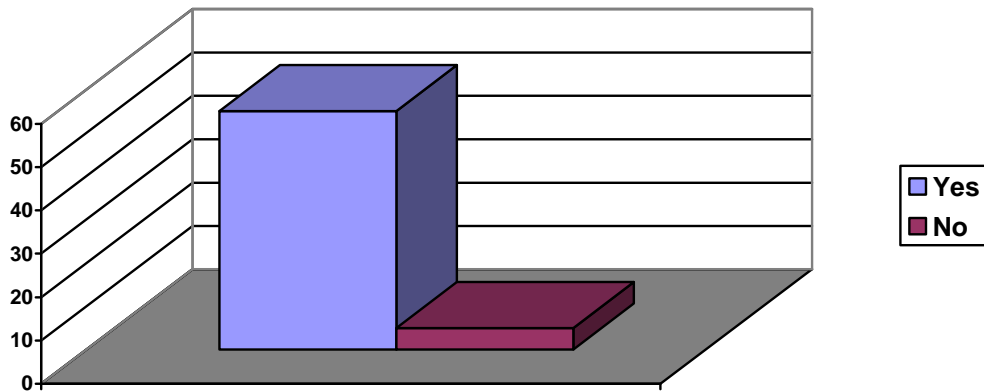




Do you know the Ten commandments ?



Do you know what the word atheism means ?



By analyzing the results of this survey I have concluded that over 80 % of students questioned believe in God. However, a surprising fact is that 45 % of these believers know all of the Ten commandments and what is more, 25% percent of them go to church regularly. Nevertheless, almost all of the questioned students knew what the word atheism means, which shows that atheism is having more and more social effect on people.

### Arguments and reasons to believe in God

Every side of this debate has its own reasons for blindly believing in God on one hand and on the other hand for being sure that God does not exist. Atheists hold on to science and pure logic for most of the time while theists mostly trust in faith and belief. In this section of my essay I will represent the strongest arguments for both sides.

If we put science aside for a while, according to the theists the existence of God cannot be proved or disproved. The Bible says that we must accept by faith the fact that God exists: That does not mean, however, that there is no evidence of God's existence. The Bible states, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or

language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world” (Psalm 19:1-4). Looking at the stars, understanding the vastness of the universe, observing the wonders of nature, seeing the beauty of a sunset—apparently all of these things point to a Creator God. Deep within us is the recognition that there is something beyond this life and someone beyond this world. We can deny this knowledge intellectually, but God’s presence in us and all around us is still obvious. Despite this, the Bible warns that some will still deny God’s existence: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1). Since the vast majority of people throughout history, in all cultures, in all civilizations, and on all continents believe in the existence of some kind of God, according to theist belief there must be something (or someone) causing this belief.

In addition to the arguments for God’s existence in all holy books, there are logical arguments. First, there is the ontological argument. The most popular form of the ontological argument uses the concept of God to prove God’s existence. It begins with the definition of God as “a being than which no greater can be conceived. It is then argued that to exist is greater than to not exist, and therefore the greatest conceivable being must exist. The second argument is the teleological argument. The teleological argument states that since the universe displays such an amazing design, there must have been a divine Designer. For example, if the Earth were significantly closer or farther away from the sun, it would not be capable of supporting much of the life it currently does. If the elements in our atmosphere were even a few percentage points different, nearly every living thing on earth would die. The odds of a single protein molecule forming by chance is 1 in  $10^{243}$  (that is a 1 followed by 243 zeros). A single cell is comprised of millions of protein molecules.

A third logical argument for God’s existence is called the cosmological argument. Every effect must have a cause. This universe and everything in it is an effect. There must be something that caused everything to come into existence. Ultimately, there must be something “un-caused” in order to cause everything else to come into existence. That “un-caused” cause is God.

In the end, God’s existence must be accepted by faith (Hebrews 11:6). So because of this faith in God is not a blind leap into the dark; it is safe step into a well-lit room where the vast majority of people are already standing.

### **Arguments and reasons not to believe in God**

On the other hand, it is difficult to credit any one religion as being true or any one god as being true when there have been so many throughout human history. None appears to have any greater claim to being more credible or reliable than any other. Why Christianity and not Judaism? Why Islam and not Hinduism? Why monotheism and not polytheism? They cannot all be right, but they can all be wrong. I will now tell you the main reasons why atheists do not believe in any god.

First argument are contradictory characteristics in gods. Theists claim that their gods are perfect beings; they describe gods, however, in contradictory and incoherent ways. Numerous characteristics are attributed to their gods, some of which are impossible and some combinations of which are impossible. As described, it is unlikely or impossible for these gods to exist. This does not mean that no god could possibly exist, just that the ones theists claim to believe in probably do not.

Next argument is so much evil in the world. Closely associated with taking action that should be considered immoral is the fact that there is so much evil in the world today. If there are any gods, why don't they act to eliminate it? The absence of substantive action against evil would

be consistent with the existence of evil or at least indifferent gods, which is not impossible, but few people believe in such gods. Most claim that their gods are loving and powerful; the suffering on Earth makes their existence implausible.

Third reason is that faith is unreliable. A common characteristic of both theism and religion is their reliance on faith: belief in the existence of god and in the truth of religious arguments is neither founded upon nor defended by logic, reason, evidence, or science. Instead, people are supposed to have faith — a position they would not consciously adopt with just about any other issue. Faith, though, is an unreliable guide to reality or means for acquiring knowledge. You cannot rely on Faith...

Perhaps the most basic reason for not believing in any gods is the absence of good reasons for doing so. The above are decent reasons for not believing and for questioning — and eventually leaving — whatever theistic and religious beliefs a person might have had in the past. Once a person gets beyond the bias in favor of belief, though, they may realize something critical: the burden of support lies with those claiming that belief is rational and/or necessary. Believers fail to meet this burden, though, and thus fail to provide good reasons to accept their claims. If evidence was found that implied the existence of god, or, a logical argument concocted that irrefutably posited the existence of god, then it is the job of the theist to prove the additional assumptions about God: That God is good, loving, conscious, all-knowing and all-powerful, amongst others. They also must prove that God should be worshipped. They would still need to prove that Heaven and Hell exist, and that other aspects of their faith are true. Also, the mere existence of God would not help us decide which religion was true. So do not accept the simplistic assumption that just because someone says they can prove God exists, it also means they can prove anything *about* God!

We cannot conclude that the most popular religion is most likely to be correct. At various times in history various beliefs have been most-popular. For example, most people believed the world was flat. It does not mean it was! In the future, Islam will be the most popular religion. It does not mean, however, that it becomes the true religion. Popularity is not a measure of truth.

Non-religious people are growing in number, nonetheless, thanks to the teachings of logic and scientific thinking.

Statistically, non-religious people are the 3rd largest philosophy in the world:

- 1 Christianity with 2.1 billion people (in decline)
- 2 Islam with 1.3 billion people (fastest growing religion with annual growth rate of 230%, concentrated in India and Africa)
- 3 "Non-religious" with 1.1 billion people (concentrated in Occident, Russia and China) (constant growth)

### **Similarities between Theists and Atheists**

The Universe exists. Theists, who believe in God(s), and atheists, who do not believe that god(s) exist, beside their major differences still have some similar assumptions and theories. This part of my essay highlights those assumptions and arguments from both sides .

1. Theists : God requires no cause  
Atheists : Universe requires no cause.

Shared conclusion: Something can exist that requires no cause.

2. Theists: God is infinite.  
Atheists: Universe is infinite.

Shared conclusion: Something can exist for infinity.

3. Theists: Logic exists because of God.  
Atheists: Logic exists as a part of the universe.

Shared conclusion: Logic exists.

These are only a few of the facts which are same in theistic and atheistic belief. No matter how different they are similarities between these two 'beliefs' will always exist .

### **Conclusion**

Whether you are a theist or an atheist your beliefs have huge effect on your character and behaviour particularly in terms of how you think and what is your image of the world. Nonetheless, like any other of our tastes, whether it is in food, clothing or choice of friends or partners, being an atheist or a theist is just another excerpt in the biography of who we are. However, we can never be sure if God is a myth or a reality because I doubt that we will ever find some evidence which will be enough to put both sides of this debate at peace. In this essay I have tried to briefly show you general facts, arguments, reasons of every belief to help you reconsider your current belief or maybe even change it! Nevertheless, my personal opinion is that atheism has better arguments and they are more likely to be true. Therefore, as Stephen Roberst said : 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.“

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