

Free Thinkers: Why Don't You Believe?

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A comprehensive summary of the talk that I gave to my Christian brothers and sisters in NUS ISCF Prayer Meeting

1 Introduction

Free-thinking is a common phenomenon that can easily be found in a developed secular country, where society tends to separate secular from spiritual life. The danger becomes real when people care for the secular achievement more to the point it becomes their measuring-rod for success, happiness, etc in life. When the political infrastructure is well-established, when new technological breakthrough is made, or when economic is booming, people start to think that all these achievements are theirs and there seems to be no God playing a role in them. People become so arrogant that they think that they need God no more. From the atheistic point of view, if man could create life through cloning, who need God to breathe the breath of life anymore. If man had the technology advanced enough to probe into the atom, who need God to explain the hidden thing for us. If art and media could come out with any sort of entertainment, who need God to soothe our mind and heart. Even if they think that God does exist, it is not for the sake of eternal salvation that they are looking for God, but it is more for the sake of themselves that they think God could help them to achieve this or that.

Yet when a great disaster does strike, some would just shrug their shoulders, taking it to be merely another unlucky event. Some may go further by blaming God for letting the suffering to happen, instead of introspecting themselves. Where was God? If He was there, why He did not give any warning before. Some, like Nietschze, will eventually go to the extreme by saying that God is already dead, or God does not care with man, while the fact is that they are just being ignorant and foolhardy.

The objective of this article is to provide the readers with adequate background on what free-thinking is (at least in Singaporean context, if not in general), and also to expose the readers to typical issues in the Christian-VS-free-thinkers debate.

In the subsequent section I will start with the definition of free thinkers, which in general I classify into two major groups, the atheists and the agnostics. Common arguments, such as the existence of God, the origin of evil, and whether good deeds can bring us into salvation, will be discussed along the way in section 2 and 3. In section 4, I will try to present my best argument as why Christianity should be the most “logical” choice of belief.

This article is written based on materials that I mostly learnt from celebrated Christian apologist, such as Dave Geisler and Ravi Zacharias. I also took some materials from Lee Strobel’s *The Case for Creator*. Hence, pardon me if you find similar arguments that you have read before in this article. However, section 4 was written purely out of my own conviction. Anyway, I have taken the liberty to paraphrase some of the arguments or to use illustrations as to suit my listeners, who are mostly students and academicians.

2 What is Free Thinker

What are free-thinking? Who can we called as free-thinkers? Oxford online dictionary defines free-thinker as one who refuses to submit his reason to the control of authority in matters of religious belief. There are many reasons as why he would not want to submit himself under a religious belief. For example, it could be that he found it unnecessary to do so as there is no God to submit to in the first place. It could be that he was so disappointed to the point he might think that God or his used-to-be religion had cheated him. In fact, from conversation with my free-thinker friends, they choose to be free-thinkers simply because it is convenient. Well, convenient in the sense that there is no attachment or obligation to follow or attended any religious rites or ceremonies.

From experience, I classify free thinkers into 2 main categories. The first refers to those who do not recognize the existence of God, i.e. the **atheists**. While the second refers to those who do recognize the existence of God, but choose not to attach himself to any particular religious system, i.e. the **agnostics**.

3 Atheism: Does God Exist?

Atheism is defined as disbelief in, or denial of, the existence of a God. By disbelieving in the existence of a God, an atheist automatically reject all kind of moral obligation or duty to God. Some might have been born into an atheistic environment. However, there are many cases that, for various reasons, someone who used to be a theist becomes an atheist.

An atheist does not believe that God should exist in the first place, hence it does not make sense if we start talking about God’s love and justice to them. Thus, I think the best strategy is to straight away working on to build the conviction that God does exist, and deduce a few characteristics of God from that premise. Few arguments below are what I mostly use to convince my case.

3.1 Causality Argument

The law of nature is the law of cause-and-effect. It is in the heart of every scientist, both natural as well as social scientists, to be able to explain the cause of the resulted phenomena that was observed. There will be no smoke if there is no fire. Yet the question now is what or who create the fire. And we keep on tracing the question back we will eventually arrive at the originator, the **Uncaused Cause**, or the **First Cause**. **It is by definition that the First Cause does not need a cause for it to exist.**

This argument will usually lead to the argument about the origin of universe. Does universe has a origin in the first place? If it does, then it would support the argument about the First Cause. If it does not, then there is no need for the First Cause to exist, because the universe can then sustain itself for eternity. Yet, is it the case?

It is accepted by the scientific community nowadays that we are living in an expanding universe. Cosmic wave background radiation has proved that. Now imagine if we could somehow capture the expansion into a video, and play it backward then we will see that the universe should be shrinking to singularity. This shows that universe must have a beginning, i.e. the singularity. Yet it is not all. It turns out that the expansion rate of the universe is positive, which implies that it is accelerating away. This argument shows that there is no way for the universe to expand and shrink continuously for infinite time as some skeptics may suggest. As if it were the case, then the universe expansion would have to decelerate, instead of accelerating.

If we are sure that the universe has the beginning and it was caused by the First Cause, it implies that the the First Cause must be infinite. This is to show that **God is the all-powerful, omnipotent God**. Only the infinite can cause the finite universe, but not the other way around.

3.2 Moral Argument

Moral is defined to be the ability to distinguish the principles between right and wrong. For Christians, we base our objective absolute moral value on the Bible. Yet Someone need not have to read the Bible or follow Christianity to admit that there is certain division between right and wrong. In this case we argue that **objective moral value does exist**. Objective in the sense that everyone would agree upon which is right and which is wrong. An example is the Nonoi case, just happened recently around 2 weeks ago. The story was that a little girl was just brutally being murdered, and it happend that the murderer was the step-father of the victim herself. What interesting was that, when the police took the suspect, few angry Singaporeans blocked the police car carrying the suspect. Why were they angry? She was not their daughters. They did not even know her till the news broke out. Well, because they know how wrong and terrible what the suspect had done. Another classic example: noone in his correct mind would agree that Hitler had done a right thing when he decided to eliminate the Jews.

But how can these people distinguish between right and wrong if there is no absolute reference point that is absolutely good. Otherwise one is like a person on a boat at sea on one cloudy night without compass where he would be able to distinguish between north and south without the absolute reference point of the compass needle. Going along this line, we will eventually conclude that there should be a Moral-giver who set this absolute moral goodness. Simply said, **the existence of objective moral value implies the existence of a Moral-giver.**

If God is the Moral-giver and He set the objective absolute moral value, then to Him the perfect righteousness belongs, to argue that **God is holy**. simply said, being holy implies that God is purely righteous.

I recall one conversation with my friend that about this that lead into a question, "If God set the difference between good and evil, does that imply that God also created evil, because it is impossible to introduce what is good without introducing what is evil at the same time?" This usually leads to typical questions often raised up by skeptics. Did God create evil? Where is God when evil strikes? Is God powerless against evil? Otherwise why would He not eliminate evil altogether, making world to be a better place since beginning. Hume expressed this by saying, "Is he (God) willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing: whence then is evil?"

All right, let us try to deal with all these questions one by one. Firstly, did God create evil? No, God did not create it. But God made evil to be possible when He gave man the free-will. God did not create man to be a robot, programmed specifically only to do good things. Praise God, that He created man altogether with his freedom to choose to do good or evil, and hence we have the meaning of what it means to live fully as a human, not as a machine programmed to do only certain tasks. **God made evil possible, but it is man who make it actual.** Therefore do not blame God for the evil things that have been happening around.

Secondly, it is not that God is not able or is not willing to eliminate evil. He is going to do it someday. And for that we should give thank actually, instead of complaining, because if He really would to do it now, then He would do it according to His standard of perfect absolute righteousness, and we for sure would be inside His elimination list. As Ravi Zacharias put it: if God is all-powerful, He can defeat evil; if God is all-good, He will defeat evil; evil is still not yet defeated; therefore, **God can and will one day defeat evil.**

3.3 Intelligent Design Argument

Imagine yourself walking on the desert, far away from any civilization, and suddenly you saw a pyramid in the middle of nowhere. Would you believe if I said to you that it was constructed incidentally during a desert-storm, just because you saw noone living there? Well, certainly not, would you? You might argue that a lost civilization might have lived around long long time ago, or your imagination might run so wild that it was the work of ETs. Anyway the

bottomline is that, you would see the pyramid as a result of an intelligent design.

Our physical body is an example of a product from an intelligent design. Someone need not have to be a scientist to recognize how wonderful our body is. To think that our bodies with all its complicated yet precise mechanism and metabolism was a product of long sequence of chances through evolution is as absurd as to think that a tornado in a junkyard could assemble a fully-functioning Boeing. **God is the intelligent designer.**

4 Agnosticism: How Good You Should Be?

Agnosticism is defined as One who holds that the existence of anything beyond and behind material phenomena is unknown and (so far as can be judged) unknowable, and especially that a First Cause and an unseen world are subjects of which we know nothing. From the point of view of an agnostic, God may or may not exist (in which case will lead back to atheism). Yet for those who accept that God does exist, they reject all kind of attachment with any particular religion. From experience I found that there usually two groups of people fall into this category those who find that religion is a burden, and those who have been disappointed with a particular religion, and decided not to involve with any religious system whatsoever. They will then just choose to lead a morally good life. I find this is quite a common case in Singapore.

Every religion would lead to God. This is the statement from **pluralism**. I usually start my counter-argument by commenting that trying to reach a particular place by just arbitrarily going to any direction is as good as being lost itself. Pluralists may argue that all religions teach about the same things, i.e. doing good deeds, being kind to others, etc, in which sense Christianity is not different from any other religion. Well, these people clearly do not know the essence of Christianity for sure¹. Yet, putting Christians doctrine aside, I would just raise up the issue on how good is good. Common answer is that to be as good as possible, so that *hopefully* they have done more good than evil.

Moralist would say that as long as your good deeds is more than your wrongdoing, that would be sufficient to guarantee your entrance to heaven. However, recalling the fact that God being the moral-giver implies that He is holy. Hence He will not tolerate evil, no matter how insignificant it is, *unless God Himself actively forgives and does not hold our evil deed into account anymore*. However, only Christianity that teaches about God's active forgiveness over sin, and that is through the work of Christ (whence the word Christianity is derived).

Moralists usually are not uncomfortable with this. They will usually come out with a list of names of so-called considerably good people who were not Christians, yet their lives had shown so much passion and kindness. Take for example, Mahatma Gandhi. Do you think he would gain entrance to heaven?

¹In Christian teaching it is not good deeds that bring salvation. It is personal faith in Jesus that brings salvation and we love others as a bare-fruit of our faith to give-thank to God because He has already loved us first

Or would he end in hell simply because he never personally acknowledged Jesus to be his personal saviour?

This is a tough yet typical question from the moralists. And frankly, I cannot be sure of the answer without being judgemental at the same time. Yet I am not in the position to judge whether he would or would not get into heaven. First of all, we cannot be sure whether he had or had not admitted Jesus as his personal saviour. He might never have done it publicly, but who can see inside someone's heart. Secondly, I need to emphasize once again that God, being the one who set the absolute moral value, is holy. Unless we dare enough to claim that you were sinless throughout your life, which is obviously impossible, even for Gandhi, there is no way God would allow us to come into His presence. Interestingly, in his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi, albeit a devout Hindu, realized this and said, "Oh wretched man that I am. It is a constant source of torture to me that I am so far from the one I know to be my very life and being, and I know that it is my own sin and wretchedness that hides Him from me."

² This is a fact, and I am not sure how did Gandhi worked this problem out. However, for sure Christ has provided you the way out (John 14:6), and it is not through good deeds. While others are wondering whether they are already good enough to go into heaven, why do not we just follow Christ that surely can bring us to heaven. Anyway, how many people on this earth could live up to Gandhi's standard.

5 Why Christianity?

This is a question that makes free-thinker uncomfortable. Obviously that at the end of the day the main purpose of all these debates and arguments is to bring our friends to come under the light of Christ.

I do not want to go into detailed comparative study between Christianity and other religions, nor do I want to pit Christian worldview against all other sort of worldviews (theistic or atheistic) here. Many excellent book have been published with regard to this issue. However, allow me to answer this personally right from my own conviction. And, by the way, this is also the answer that I give to my non-Christian friends if they ask me the same question.

It is true that I was born in the Christian family, which you may think that it might cause me to be biased toward Christianity. Yet I have been spending a lot of time thinking about this. Afterall, my educational background train me to be skeptical and to question anything. Thus same careful analysis and comparative study also I applied to my belief.

Personally, to me taking up a particular religion is not just for the sake of getting into heaven. If it is just about getting into heaven, then all religions eventually promise the same thing, be that *syurga*, *nirvana*, or whatever they call it. Taking up a particular religion is not just to teach me to distinguish what is good and evil. Frankly, in my opinion, you do not really need a religion to teach you that. Doctrines, such as mono-theistic deity, unconditional sacrificial

²<http://www.probe.org/content/view/769/142/>

love, non-retaliation against hostility, do not exclusively belong to Christianity. So what makes Christianity to be unique?

What makes **Christianity** unique is because it **is the only religion** as far as I know **where God is the one taking the initiative to actively seeking for man**. It makes a perfect sense to me, and in fact it should be the way, because **there is no way for finite man** (with finite amount of effort, in finite amount of time) **can reach the infinite God**. It is much more logical for the infinite to reach the finite. And even more amazing is the reason behind God's act: that is **because He loves us so much... so much that He is willing to sacrifice His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sin**. Through Jesus our relationship with God becomes so closed **that we can call Him Father and He calls us sons**. God and man, the creator and the created, the all-powerful omnipotent and the nobody, the most holy and the most sinful, yet the father and the sons. I think from this wonderful relationship all other Christian teachings are derived.

How do I know all these? On what basis I put my belief? Well, it is not on what my preacher said. It is not on what my parent said, or what my friends said. It is on the Bible. Is the Bible reliable? Is it trustworthy? Well, I believe it is, although I am not going to argue about the credibility and infallibility of the Bible here. Save that for other articles.

6 Final Remarks

I believe though that at the end of the day, it is not on how skillful or convincing our argument is to bring the free-thinkers to God. To believe in Jesus and to accept Him as someone's personal saviour is itself requires a leap of faith that is enabled only by the Holy Spirit through God's grace. Mostly from experience, I notice that after all the debate, my friend just laughed and went off, not saying anything.

In that sense I tend to agree with Ravi Zacharias' comment that even if Jesus does show up in front of them, just like what He did to Saul, it is a different issue whether they want to accept Him or not. Modern society is very good in coming out with all sort of excuses to explain such spiritual phenomenon: daydreaming, hallucinating, etc. Thus it is not a problem with whether God is there, or whether God has revealed Himself or not. It is a problem with faith.

No scientific theory as far as I know could explain how a dead person could come back to life after 3 days, as in the case of Jesus. This is purely a miracle. And miracle can only be accepted through faith. Jesus is God, incarnated and died for us to save us from sin. Again you can only accept that through faith.

I notice that most of my free-thinker friends bought the argument about God's existence. However when it came to the argument about the needs for personal saviour, they become very reluctant to continue. For this, I see no other reason besides the devil working behind one's ego and stubbornness to resist every single God's attempt for salvation, for which case we can only pray that God may open their hearts.

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