

# Atheism: Some assembly required

## Devil's Advocate

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Managing Editor

"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone..." As an Atheist, I will be the first to say Atheists need to get their act together. This is not to say that I am "sinless," but given my lack of faith in the existence of a divine stone caster, and the apparent need for stones to be cast, I'll try my arm.

Atheists spend copious amounts of time discussing how wrong other religions, especially Christianity, are and they may be right. Yet few of them offer much solution to any of the problems they say religion presents.

We often speak of Christian legislation, and how we need to stop it or help block it. Yet, seemingly for fear of failure, we rarely see any openly Atheist candidates running for office. We hear ourselves ranting on about how closed-minded and uneducated Christians are, yet often refuse to crack open a Bible to challenge ourselves.

In fact, while recent statistics may show that non-religious people seem to know more than the religious on religion, I would argue that much of this is for the sake of verbal attacks and battles, not due to a longing for understanding.

What's more is that Atheists seem to have an astounding obstacle when organizing. Often compared to herding cats, getting a group of Atheists together, while necessary, is hell on a very good day.

Our kind often takes pride in our individuality. This pride, though, is often our downfall it seems. We go against the grain in our pursuit of free thought, which teaches us to defend our beliefs, teaches us to stand up and fight. Thus, when we gather, a fiscally and rather socially conservative atheist will almost always offend a very liberal Atheist.

In short, we seem to be offended by anything that challenges our opinion. We become overly sensitive which makes progress virtually impossible. We allow people like Rick Santorum to take stabs at our youth by teaching them about the so called "Theory in Crisis" because the people who normally would stop him are too busy trying to convince each other of the "proper" form of Atheism.

A group that claims to gain strength in diversity is ultimately conquered by it. With nearly 1.1 billion Atheists in the world it's almost as though there are 1.1 billion "denominations"

of Atheism. Even Protestant Christianity only has 33,000.

Should we stop being individuals and become the sheep we often label everyone else as? Of course not; we should however beef up on our vocabulary for the sake of clarity.

The word Atheist derives from the Greek "Theos," meaning God, the prefix A-, meaning without, and of course -ism, meaning belief in. Therefore Atheism purely means without belief in God (or gods).

Most people, though, will consider themselves "agnostic, not atheist." Agnostic comes from the Greek "Gnosis," meaning knowledge, therefore meaning without knowledge. The problem, then, is that saying you're agnostic doesn't tell anyone what you believe.

In fact, all reasonable people should consider themselves agnostic as there is no empirical proof either way on the existence of God; all religion is belief, not knowledge.

This, then, is a problem as well as a solution. The solution is that we, quarreling individuals, may be united through our understanding that to be atheist is simply to lack belief. That, if only that, we have in common.

The problem is that many lack the testicular fortitude to come out and admit they don't believe. Many of us are scared of losing friends, reputation, respect or anything of the sort. Others claim that to say there is no God, which we can't prove, is along the same vein of the Christian means of shoving religion down your throat. Its not.

Stepping out and letting people know who you are is what makes this country great. It is not our conservative, God-fearing façade. It is our bravery, our strength, and our civil fighting spirit. Simply stating "I don't believe" is not only your right, it is the true essence of the American spirit; Christians do it every day when they disagree with Islam, Buddhism, etc, and it is their right as well.

The trick to keeping respect and reputation is, then, to hold yourself in a manner fit for any faith. Being an Atheist doesn't mean being immoral. In fact, it allows one to update and adapt morality to be more comprehensive. Whereas ancient texts may condone slavery, or chauvinistic manners, Atheism can reason its way to an ever improving morality.

This being said, I present my final, major problem: Self-centeredness.

In Wisconsin there is an organization called the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF), an incredible example of when Atheist community

flourishes. This group publishes a monthly newspaper, free thought texts, and gives an incredible amount of aid to civil cases that encroach on individual's first amendment rights to freedom of religion.

I applaud this work, and have one simple suggestion: reach out in different ways. While I think their work is outstanding, I often find myself wishing they would organize "missions" to poor or underdeveloped areas, much like our religious brethren. Through the lens of humanitarian aid God becomes irrelevant; if he's there, he beckons us to help, if not, who else will help? This organization is directed towards aiding first world problems, while the third world suffers no less.

Through our faults, however, I think we Atheists have got the right idea. We challenge, we fight, and we evolve. What sets us apart is that this article would not destroy our institution. I highly doubt I will be burned at the stake for it. I can play the role of Martin Luther yet be embraced rather than expelled. It is only through my love for our quest for truth, freedom of thought, and pure growth that I urge my fellow secular souls to strive endlessly for self improvement; to long for the mirror that shows our imperfections rather than shy from it.

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