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A Deep Dive into the Atheistic Religion - Part 2
Modern Secular Religions

By Freddy Davis

In parts one and two of this four part series, we have looked at the very concept of atheistic secular religions, given a historical look at how Atheism has evolved throughout history, and explained how secular religions get expressed in society.

You can read part 1 at:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2022/03/a-deep-dive-into-the-atheistic-religion-part-1>.

You can read part 2 at:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2022/03/a-deep-dive-into-the-atheistic-religion-part-2>.

In part three, we will take a look at the most common secular religions we see in society.

An Explanation of Some of the More Common Secular Religions

Generally speaking, people who believe in some form of secular religion do not consider themselves, nor their beliefs, to be religious. In fact many, if not most, would highly object to being identified that way. Most consider themselves to be "non-religious," or even "anti-religious." However, as was explained earlier, the problem arises from how they define the concept of religion, not from the beliefs themselves. Any set of beliefs that must be believed by faith is a religious belief, and all secular religions fit into this category.

In looking at the various secular religions listed below, the nuance difference between the different ones should be obvious. At the same time, it should also be obvious that the essential answers

to the three worldview questions in each one aligns completely with the answers given by Naturalism.

Atheism

The word Atheism literally means "without god." It derives from the Greek word *a*, which means "no," "not," or "without," and *theos* which means "God." So it literally means, "no God," "not God," or "without God." Thus, an Atheist is one who believes that there is actual positive evidence that there is no God. People with this belief assert that all of existence can be explained naturally, and that all religious belief in a god is false.

What is the nature of ultimate reality?

Atheists positively assert that God does not exist.

What is a human being?

Atheists affirm that man is the chance result of billions of years of natural evolutionary progress.

What is the ultimate a person and get from this life?

Atheists assert that there is no life after death, so survival and achieving maximum fulfillment in this life is mankind's highest aim.

Agnosticism

English biologist Thomas Henry Huxley coined the word "Agnostic" in 1869. However, the concept has been around much longer. In fact, it can even be seen in the writings of certain ancient Hindu and Greek philosophers.

The word Agnosticism also comes from the Greek. As with Atheism, this word also begins with the Greek

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word *a* and is combined with the word *gnosis* – which means knowledge. Thus, the term literally means "no knowledge," "not knowledge," or "without knowledge." An Agnostic believes there is not enough evidence to prove or disprove the existence of God. A true Agnostic will criticize both the Theist and the Atheist for their presumption that it is possible to have such knowledge. While this kind of position is very difficult to hold with any kind of consistency, it basically attempts to remain neutral on the topic of the existence of God by trying to remain in a state of suspended judgment.

There are generally two expressions of Agnosticism. One asserts that there is not enough evidence to know with certainty whether or not there is a God, but leaves open the possibility of obtaining that knowledge. The second type believes that it is objectively impossible for anyone to ever know with certainty whether or not there is a god. Interestingly, even though Agnostics assert they can't know whether or not God exists, they conceive of reality in the same way as Atheists. They believe, and live, "as if" Atheism is true.

What is the nature of ultimate reality?

Agnostics assert that there is no way to know whether or not God exists.

What is a human being?

Agnostics affirm that man is the chance result of billions of years of natural evolutionary progress.

What is the ultimate a person and get from this life?

Agnostics assert that there is no way to know anything about the possibility of life after death, so survival and achieving maximum fulfillment in this life is mankind's highest aim.

Existentialism

The roots of Existentialism can be traced to the early eighteenth century. Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Danish philosopher and theologian, taught that faith in God and Christ did not have any rational basis. Rather, he said that it required an irrational leap of faith that transcended pure reason and logical coherence. This total reliance on personal experience to find spiritual meaning and peace in God was a precursor to the later atheistic Existentialism. The atheistic form asserts that no god exists, and that each individual has to find an "authentic experience" in this temporal life however he or she can.

In some ways it is difficult to define or categorize 20th century Existentialism because it had no single organized expression. It was more a philosophical stance that emerged from attempts to find meaning in life without acknowledging the objective existence of God. In that respect, it is similar to 21st century postmodern philosophy and, in fact, was its precursor.

Existentialism came fully into its own after World War II. Novels and plays by avant-garde writers like Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Albert Camus (1913-1960) pushed the philosophy into popular culture. By the middle of the 1960s, its influences were felt in many aspects of Western culture and the arts. Though widespread acceptance of this philosophy waned in the 1970s, its effect on society still lingers with people's commonly held attitude of "I'm free to choose my own moral beliefs and lifestyle."

While there is no single existentialist position, certain recurring themes do define the philosophy. The writings of Existentialists tend to focus on the topics of existence, change, freedom, and self-awareness. The primary doctrine tying them all together is that everything is subjective, and that "*being* is prior to *doing*." Existentialists

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Contact Information

If you wish to contact us directly, you may do so by the following methods:

321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312

E-mail:

info@marketfaith.org

Phone: 850-383-9756 (Tallahassee, Florida)

Fax: 850-514-4571

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believe that human life is locked in a closed system that begins at physical birth and ends at physical death. Therefore, each person must choose how to live his or her own life.

Existentialism is rooted in a naturalistic worldview, and is, therefore, atheistic. It is interesting to note, however, that there is both a secular and a religious version. That said, the religious variation is still essentially atheistic, using religious vocabulary to express its beliefs while redefining those Christian words in ways that convey existentialist ideas.

What is the nature of ultimate reality?

Secular Existentialists do not acknowledge even the concept of God. Religious Existentialists also don't believe in an objectively real God, but do use the word to refer to "the deepest concerns of a person's life." In either case, Existentialism totally denies any kind of transcendent existence.

What is a human being?

In Existentialism, a human being's essence is assumed to exist based simply on the fact that the individual person exists. Put another way, human beings are purely self-conscious natural animals. They have no intrinsic worth or purpose. Individuals have many possibilities by which they are able to define their own essence, and each person must choose for him or herself how they will do that.

What is the ultimate a person and get from this life?

Life's ultimate, in Existential philosophy, is the subjective experience of acceptance one feels during a crisis. When individuals psychologically and emotionally work through their forlornness and angst, and they accept the true reality of existence (that life is meaningless), then fulfillment, ("authentic existence," or "self actualization") comes.

Marxism

The core beliefs of Marxism are expressed in Karl Marx's (1818-1883) concept of dialectical materialism. This philosophy asserts that economic factors are the primary drivers of the flow of history. Marx got his belief about this from the writings of Georg Hegel (1770-1831). Hegel's belief was that the only true reality was the material universe.

Based on his naturalistic beliefs, Hegel developed a philosophy that he called the "dialectic." He proposed that whatever the status quo might be at any given time could be termed as a "thesis." His theory went on to conclude that eventually an opposing idea would emerge and challenge the original thesis. He called this opposing idea "anti-thesis." Over time, those two conflicting ideas would merge and form a third concept that he called a "synthesis." That synthesis would then become the new "thesis," which would eventually be challenged by a new "anti-thesis," that would then lead to another "synthesis." The theory goes on to assert that as this process continued over time, it would eventually get rid of all material confines, and perfect truth and divinity would be realized in the individual.

Marx took Hegel's dialectic logic and applied it to society at large and called his creation Dialectical Materialism. He concluded that as this process played out in society through economic forces, eventually, and inevitably, a perfect society (Utopia) would emerge.

Marx applied Hegel's concepts to society by asserting that the history of society is actually the history of class struggle. According to his assumptions, a ruling class could only stay in power as long as it was considered the best representative of those who are the most economically productive – the workers. When the workers considered that the leaders were no longer looking out for their

best interests, those leaders had to be destroyed and replaced. Marx believed that through this process, a classless society would eventually emerge.

According to Marx's theory, the capitalist society of his day (anti-thesis) had destroyed the unproductive feudal nobility that came before it (thesis), and had replaced it with a new industrial order (synthesis). In his mind, the stage was set for one final struggle between the capitalist class (the bourgeoisie - new thesis) that had completed its historic role, and the working class (the proletariat - new anti-thesis) that had become the new productive class. He believed that it was these industrial workers who would complete the revolution by overturning capitalism and create a true classless society (new synthesis).

Marx, however, failed to predict the rise of the middle-class in the industrial nations. As workers began to experience greater amounts of the benefits of economic expansion and growth, the appeal of Marxism waned.

What is the nature of ultimate reality?

The Marxist god is humanity's inevitable march toward societal perfection based on the economic principals of dialectical materialism. All of this is built upon the understanding that there is no supernatural God, but that mankind is master of his own destiny.

What is a human being?

Marxism denies the worth and freedom of the individual. Individuals have value only as they promote the common good of society. This is based on the notion that human beings are merely an animal creature.

What is the ultimate a person and get from this life?

The ultimate in life, in Marxism, is achieved as individuals deny their own personal desires and find the place where they can most effectively contribute to the collective society here on earth.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a philosophy that centers on the central reality of the individual. It asserts that there is no such thing as a belief that is true for all people – everyone can have their own truth. It rejects the very ideas of rationality, objectivity, and universal truth. In its place, it stresses the diversity of human experience and multiplicity of perspectives.

While Postmodernists contend that there is no such thing as objective truth, they make their assertion in the form of an objective truth claim. Logically, Postmodernism is self-contradictory, but that does not prevent people from following this belief system all the same.

What is the nature of ultimate reality?

In Postmodernism, there is no objective concept of God. God is considered a personal concept, and the meaning assigned to that word must be determined by each individual. There is acknowledged to be no transcendent God who has created a meaningful world.

What is a human being?

Human beings, in postmodern thought, are the animal creatures on earth that have evolved the most complex brains. Humans are not understood to be spiritual beings, and in that sense are not fundamentally different from other animals. The only difference Postmodernists acknowledge between human beings and other animals is the level of evolutionary development of the brain.

What is the ultimate a person and get from this life?

Postmodernism's ultimate is merely the attempt by individuals to find personal meaning in a universe with no transcendent meaning.

Secular Humanism

Secular Humanism is an atheistic belief system, but has a much broader scope than Atheism proper. Atheism puts more of an emphasis on the nonexistence of God, while Secular Humanism attempts to touch every aspect of life – including matters related to values, meaning, and identity.

As a belief system, Secular Humanism is unique among the secular religions. While most are thought of merely as philosophical points of view, Secular Humanism has actual tenets that relate to the faith essentials – and these essentials correspond to naturalistic worldview beliefs. Additionally, Secular Humanism has organized itself into an actual organizational structure as a non-profit institution. Over the years, Secular Humanists have codified their beliefs in the form of three "Humanist Manifestos." The first one was written in 1933, the second in 1973, and the third in 2003.

Secular Humanists hold that human beings can legitimately deduce proper ethical behavior using human reason alone. Proper ethics and morality, for them, are determined by observing the results of particular actions people perform. Once these results are identified, Secular Humanists attempt to develop what they consider a proper moral code and ethical principles based on the results that various actions yield in the lives of real men and women. As a starting point, it affirms the dignity and worth of all human beings and their ability to determine right and wrong by appealing to universal human qualities.

Secular Humanism also asserts that all attempts to explain the existence of the supernatural is mythology. While Secular Humanism is, itself, a faith system, it nonetheless considers faith an unacceptable basis for action. It depends on human reason to find the truth rather than revelation, mysticism, or tradition.

Beyond that, Secular Humanism asserts that everything in existence can ultimately be known using the scientific method. It claims to depend, for its beliefs, completely on the collection of data through observation and experimentation, and formulates its conclusions based on testing and the development of hypotheses.

Regarding political action, Secular Humanism emphasizes individual freedom and responsibility, human values, compassion, and the need for tolerance and cooperation. In conjunction with that, it rejects authoritarian beliefs. It holds that individuals must take responsibility for their own lives, for various communities, and for the problems of the world as a whole.

What is the nature of ultimate reality?

Secular Humanism asserts that the natural universe is all that exists, and that the universe consists of material substances that are eternal and evolving. As such, there is no type of supernatural existence at all (God, gods, angels, ghosts, or any other kind of spiritual entity). Essentially, mankind is his own god.

What is a human being?

Secular Humanism holds that man is nothing more than a highly evolved biological machine. It contends that this "machine" can be completely accounted for based on naturalistic evolution. Since Secular Humanists allow for no other possibility, at some point in the past, life had to have emerged from non-life and evolved to ultimately form human beings. As such, humans are purely animal creatures that are no different from any other animal creature in existence beyond the specific characteristics that distinguish homo sapiens from other animal species. They recognize that man is the only natural animal that possesses the attributes of self-awareness and moral agency.

What is the ultimate a person and get from this life?

Life's ultimate, in Secular Humanism, consists of fulfilling one's highest potential in mortal life. As Secular Humanists believe that there is no life after death, achieving maximum fulfillment in this life is the highest goal it is possible to achieve.

Skepticism

The word Skepticism is derived from the Greek word *skeptomai* meaning "to doubt" or "to consider." Skeptics believe that a person cannot know any kind of truth with absolute certainty, so one should suspend judgment

on all matters that relate to truth. Their skepticism applies not only to knowledge of God, but to everything else in life where a truth claim is asserted. Interestingly, even though Skeptics assert that people can't know whether or not God exists, they conceive of reality in the same way as Atheists. They believe, and live, "as if" the atheistic point of view is true.

As a philosophical movement, Skepticism originated in ancient Greece between 400 - 200 B.C., in several different schools. After St. Augustine attacked the Skeptics in the late 300s A.D., ancient skepticism faded out. It made somewhat of a comeback in the 1500 and 1600s, but then faded out again. The next comeback of Skepticism occurred in the 1700s when David Hume asserted it as part of the emerging trend of naturalistic beliefs. This point of view continues to be discussed among naturalistic philosophers.

What is the nature of ultimate reality?

Skeptics assert that it is impossible for humans to know anything about God, and that people should suspend judgement on that matter.

What is a human being?

Skeptics affirm that man is the chance result of billions of years of natural evolutionary progress.

What is the ultimate a person and get from this life?

Skeptics assert that there is no life after death, so achieving maximum fulfillment in this life is mankind's highest aim.

Moving On

In this article we have looked at the more prominent secular religions that exist in modern society. In the final article, part four, we will explore how to effectively create interaction with people who believe in secular religions in order to be able to share the gospel with them.

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