

10 Misconceptions of the Christian Faith

#8 Life Has Meaning and Purpose Without God

It was true, I had always realized it—I hadn't any "right" to exist at all. I had appeared by chance, I existed like a stone, a plant, a microbe. I could feel nothing to myself but an inconsequential buzzing. I was thinking . . . that here we are eating and drinking, to preserve our precious existence, and that there's nothing, nothing, absolutely no reason for existing.

– Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*

"It is extremely difficult to be a normal human being and not think that some actions are wrong and some are right."

– Alvin Plantinga, *Great Thinkers on Great Questions*

Humans Have No Value Without God. Sartre captures with haunting beauty the logical conclusions concerning our existence if there is no God. If humanity is the blind product of time, matter and chance, a "miscarriage of nature" if you will, then there can be no inherent value of human beings over any other part of the material world. If all there is and all there ever will be is impersonal matter, then it makes no difference what that matter constitutes. If God doesn't exist, we are immaterial or extraneous cosmic accidents. Just as our origination is unintended, our destruction is unintended – and irrelevant. Our lives are not qualitatively different from any other body of matter, whether or not that entity has breath. We become no different from a rock or tree or the most inconsequential bacteria. As one author states, "The same blind cosmic process that coughed [us] up...will eventually swallow [us] all again."ⁱ

This conclusion is a real problem for atheists, but many seem to avoid it. Nietzsche, for one, recognized the problem and faced it. He charged that if God is truly dead, then so is one of the fundamental moral bases for Western civilization; namely, the belief that human life is precious. If God does not exist, there are disastrous implications not just for Western civilization, but for all of humanity. It is far easier to make an argument for atheism than it is to live it based on the logical ramifications of that argument. In fact, no one lives entirely as though God does not exist, for no one lives as though humans have no inherent value.

Humans Have No Purpose Without God. As Sartre lamented, humans have no right or reason to exist if atheism is true. If the universe was developed by means of impersonal mechanisms, then there can be no purpose for its existence, no more reason than for a swirl in a mountain stream. Everything that exists is an accident – you, your family, your closest friend, love, your talents, your accomplishments, the joy of music, the beauty of spring, the wonder of the starry skies, the expansiveness of the universe, the law of gravity, and on and on. Our educational pursuits, our passion for social justice, our interest in human flourishing, our commitment to doing what is "right" – these are all a mirage. There is, and can be, no substance to them. Each is utterly meaningless and without basis. All that remains is the simple practice of self-deception, and the delusion that there is purpose or meaning to life apart from God.

There Can Be No Objective Standards of Right and Wrong. Natural selection does not and cannot produce prescriptive morality. One cannot derive moral "ought" from "what is" if "what is" results from blind processes and impersonal or irrational forces. The concept of moral obligation is meaningless and unintelligible apart from the existence of God. The same words may be used, but their meanings are empty.

Without a foundation for morality, who is to say that Pol Pot or Stalin or Hitler is better or worse than Mother Theresa or Ghandi or Martin Luther King, Jr.? Atheism lacks the grounds on which to condemn war, the murder of helpless victims, the oppression of innocent children, the starving of the poor, the torturing of harmless victims (let alone potential terrorists), cruelty to animals, the opposition of women's or minorities' rights, and the list goes on. One person cannot criticize the moral actions of another person and one culture cannot criticize the moral behavior of another culture. Consider the implications of this. It makes it impossible to judge the horrendous and inexcusable tyrants throughout history. It makes it impossible to strive for or justify moral reform in a culture. Ultimately, atheists who affirm any sense of right and wrong, or ascribe value, meaning or purpose to human life, do so without an adequate basis.

Christian Theism Provides a Much Different Perspective. Christians believe that God created the world with order, meaning, and purpose. All creation in its purest forms reflects his characteristics of wisdom, love, beauty, power, joy, eternity, infinitude, justice, and holiness. Humans are the height of God's creation, the only creatures made in God's own image. He has given humankind purposes such as caring for his creation, enjoying him, and reflecting his character in our lives and relationships. Moreover, God has called Christians to take part in the work he is doing to restore his truth and order in the world that has been subverted by our own mistakes and rebellion. Therefore, a Christian has the potential to contribute to a purpose that corroborates with the reason for which the world was made.

If God does not exist, then all that remains is anguish, hopelessness and despair. Some have called it reality. Some have called it depressing. Some have called it nauseating. Christians call it absurd. If God does exist, then there is hope and meaning and purpose to our lives. We call that reality. We call that exciting. We call that a life worth living. What do you say?

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ⁱ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, pg. 59.