

A decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping circles and thin lines. At the top is a large circle with a black outer ring, a white middle ring, and a purple center. Below it is another large circle with a black outer ring, a white middle ring, and a purple center. To the right, a smaller circle with a black outer ring, a white middle ring, and an orange center is partially visible. Thin lines connect the centers of these circles, forming a network of connections.

# THE PORTABLE CHRISTIAN

Christian Rebuttals to  
Atheist Arguments, Article I

Heather Sigler, J.D.

# **THE PORTABLE CHRISTIAN**

**Christian Rebuttals to Atheist Arguments**

**Article I**

**Heather Sigler, J.D.**

© Heather Sigler 2010

I happened past a book written by a well-known atheist scholar, Christopher Hitchens. I thought I would read through a few chapters before settling on anything to rebut. But I barely made it through the first two pages of the introduction before I had to stop and comment. Some of the arguments he made are uniquely Hitchens-esque; others are of the general sort that most atheists make when beginning their assaults against religion.<sup>1</sup> I will address only three in this article.

---

<sup>1</sup> I am generally confused about atheists who try to convert believers to atheism. I think that if they take their positions seriously, then this "atheist evangelism" is a silly intellectual exercise that neither they nor anyone else should take very seriously. See [www.faithisavirtue.org](http://www.faithisavirtue.org), "What is an Atheist Convert, Anyway?"

## **Moral Common Ground**

*“Exchange views with a believer even for a short time ... It will not be long until you are politely asked how you can possibly know right from wrong ... What a repulsive idea! ... Nobody had to teach me any of this, let alone reinforce the teaching with sinister fairy-tales about the Archangel Gabriel. The so-called Golden Rule is innate in us...”*

- Christopher Hitchens, *The Portable Atheist*

Hitchens' main agenda here is to counter the Christian argument that we need God to have a system of morality. Hitchens says that we have an innate sense of morality; no one had to teach us right from wrong. Any civilization that fails to develop an appropriate moral code will fall; a society will not last long if its people tolerate murder and thievery. In this way, evolution provides the solution for sifting through good civilizations and bad ones and reinforces necessary survival traits accordingly.

I am actually surprised that Hitchens bothered with this argument because it easily works against him. The fact that the “Golden Rule is innate within us” implies that we did not develop the Rule for ourselves. There are two possibilities, then, for how we came to know it: evolution or God.

There is no reason to believe that evolution is the author of moral principles on the scale that human beings aspire to. In the first place, we should be skeptical about any argument that takes the position that evolution is responsible for morality, a phenomenon requiring high rationality. Evolution without an intelligent First Mover is, by definition, a process of coincidence. In other words, if there was no intelligence lurking behind creation, then there was only chance. Thus, even the faculties by which we understand and judge the world, including morality, are the product of happenstance. These faculties are therefore as trustworthy as dice rolls, and we may as well treat them as such. "Morality" itself is arbitrary when it is simply the product of chance evolution; the "Golden Rule" becomes just another lucky number.

A common atheist retort to this observation is the assertion that evolution does not happen by chance, it happens by natural selection. But natural selection is the consequence of genetic mutation, a chance phenomenon. Within a population of living things, some will suffer mutations, which, depending upon the surrounding environment, will be either advantageous or disadvantageous to the mutated organism's survival. Advantageous mutations are more likely to be passed on to the next generation, changing the genetic profile of a population over

time. Nature doesn't "select" which phenomena are advantageous. Rather, the physical environment is such that some mutations help organisms pass on their genes while other mutations do not. Living things do not choose their environments, or their mutations, or whether their mutations happen to make it easier for them to survive in their environments. To say that Nature "selects" is to say that there is an intelligence behind nature; I invite atheists to concede this point. (Or to try to demonstrate that Nature itself is intelligent.)

Second, even if evolution were capable of producing a moral code, it would not resemble morality as we know it. Evolution is about one thing: survival. In nature, animals and insects have brutal ways of ensuring that only the strongest survive. Members of some species will slaughter each other; the ones left standing are the ones with the best survival abilities, and they will perpetuate the next generation. If human beings took a "natural" approach to morality, we would have a similarly brutal system. We would rid our species of the handicapped, the elderly, and the intellectually disabled. And we would do so without remorse because evolution's "golden rule" would be: contribute or die.

One could say that human beings have evolved to such a high level of rationality that we

have moved past those primitive ways of dealing with the “less useful” in society, and that we have developed compassion instead. But that would only take us so far. The notion that we *could* accomplish a successful society without barbarism, does not tell us that we *should*. The evolutionary theory of morality cannot explain why people should behave one way or another, it can only offer a theory as to how we came to think one way or another. (That is if you want to call “chance” a theory.)

By contrast, we have no problem understanding that the Golden Rule is both innate within us and morally righteous in itself if we choose to recognize that God made it so. C. S. Lewis explains this phenomenon quite well in *Mere Christianity*. I recommend that you read his book, if this topic interests you. In brief, the argument is as follows:

All civilizations throughout history have had a code of ethics. These codes have not always led to the same behaviors, much less the same values or laws. But they have all had fundamental similarities. For example, all societies value honor. The actions that qualify as honorable may vary, but honor is always regarded as a virtue.

I agree with Hitchens; it seems that no one had to teach us the fundamentals of morality. What

follows is that we are not responsible for creating the moral code that seems inherent to our nature. It is no more reasonable to believe that rational morality resulted from chance evolution than it would be to believe that placing random letters in a book will produce a dictionary.

### ***Man The Wise, The Wise***

In seventh grade biology class, I learned that the scientific name for human beings is *homo sapiens*, translated, “man the wise” or “wise man.” My teacher explained that scientists determined that modern man is sufficiently different from prior generations of the species and wanted to modify the scientific name accordingly. The new name is *homo sapiens sapiens*, or “man the wise the wise.” Perhaps it is true that we are wiser than our ancestors, but let’s be honest: most of what we have accomplished as a species has been in the areas of discovery. We discovered the sciences and mathematics. We learned to manipulate them; indeed, we can manipulate them in fantastic ways. But that is the most we can say.

Hitchens, on behalf of the atheist community, argues that the reason we have religion is because there was a time when mankind knew virtually nothing about the world around us. In a desperate



attempt to explain our origins and surroundings, we conjured up fantasies of God and demons. However, now that we are more enlightened, i.e. now that we have science and other secular disciplines, it is time to dismiss our primitive beliefs once and for all.

Again, Mr. Hitchens seems confused about which direction his premises lead. The systems that mankind has recently discovered (science and all the rest) do not—and could never—claim to have created anything. The practice of science is to observe phenomena, experiment, and draw explanatory conclusions. The best science can do is offer new ways to manipulate preexisting energy and matter or to reveal knowledge about the properties of energy and matter.<sup>2</sup>

Science as a discipline is a human invention. But the substance of science is a preexisting condition in the universe. For example, humans

---

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that the conceptual distinction between energy and matter is itself just a framework for understanding the world around us. There is no metaphysical, "objective" reason for us to distinguish between matter and energy, especially since we've learned that energy can become matter and vice-versa. So for atheists to use science as a cudgel against primitive religionists is a case of the tea pot and the kettle. People who believed Helios pulled the sun around the Earth did the same thing that Stephen Hawking does – viz., provide an explanation concerning observable natural phenomena – and neither of them could disprove the authority of Jesus Christ.

invented the periodic table, but they certainly did not invent the elements. The more we learn, the more we recognize how much we do not know. The universe seems to be full of spectacular nuances. Through all of our discovery, one thing is undeniable: the universe is vast and complicated; it is both dependable and unpredictable. The fact that, through science, we gain more and more knowledge about the world simply makes us better aware of how complex and wonderful the world is. This might say nothing about the source of reality, or it might suggest that reality is a design, but it certainly does not lead to the conclusion that God does not exist. Indeed, our enlightenment as a species provides more evidence for the existence of an intelligent Creator.

Some may say that I am missing the point. The idea behind Hitchens' argument is that we now know better. We know better than to believe in angels and hell because the sciences have given us more sophisticated alternatives for understanding the universe. But we have to consider whether these alternatives are necessarily superior. So far, everything science has discovered is consistent with Christianity, i.e. science has not debunked the Christian account of reality. (Surely science has debunked *something* religious, like a particular pagan myth or two, right? But I believe only in the

God of the Bible and I espouse only the Christian worldview.) Yet, science has not provided a sufficient explanation for how the universe began, while Christianity has. Consider the “big bang.” Where did the big bang particles come from? Where did they exist? Was there empty space? Where did space come from? Was it energy? Where did that start? In order for anything to have come into being, something or some place has to have existed to allow it to happen; hence the concept of infinity. Infinity is the answer to the endless question of “what came before?” Even if scientists could peer into the past and find a “big bang” happening, they could not explain its cause unless they looked further into the past, and so on, forever. We have to embrace the infinite, whether we accept religion or not. But once we do accept infinity, the “forever after” as well as the “forever before,” we become religionists, whether we like it or not. Religion is comfortable with infinity: God is infinite; He is the intelligent First Mover.

We still have to make the leap between a First Mover and the God of the Bible. That step is the easiest, actually. Assume an infinite, intelligent being is responsible for creation. What would follow? He has a personality. He was intentional in his creation endeavors. None of those require much of a leap of faith. As we know from our own

experience, intelligence implies purpose. And a creation usually tells us something about the creator. (*The Heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Psalm 19:1*)

## **Arrogance and Irony**

It strikes me as odd that Hitchens is so obsessed with an apparent narcissism with which Christians approach the universe. He thinks that because we believe that God had us in mind when He created the world and that He thinks of us personally, we are simply self-centered and arrogant. I will not bother to address the plethora of fallacies Hitchens commits when he promotes that view (not the least of which is the mangled "straw man" he tries to pass as a representation of the Christian view on this point). But I do want to point out the irony in his disdain for the Christian ego when we consider that his view insists that we must reject accounts of the personality of God because no one can know them for sure.

*"To assert this is quite simply to assert more than any human can possibly know, and thus it falls, and should be discarded, and should have been discarded long ago."*

- Christopher Hitchens, *The Portable Atheist*

Even ignoring the lack of a meaningful definition of what it is to “know” something, the absurdity of this view is glaring: the argument concludes that the only things that can be true are those things that we can know. Not only does this make no logical or empirical sense, it is also grossly arrogant. As a matter of elementary logic, our knowledge is limited to that which we have the ability to experience through our human faculties. To limit our belief systems to what we can know is putting the cart before the horse. I am sure that Hitchens would agree that our scientific understanding of the world has changed drastically over time, and there is endless more to discover. To believe that the only things that are true about the universe are those things that we can know from physical experience is absurdly self-limiting. It is like a person insisting that escargot and crème brulee cannot possibly be French cuisine because they do not conform—in flavor, texture, and substance—to the only French dish he is familiar with: the croissant.

Empirically, we know that many of the most fundamental parts of the human experience are still largely a mystery, yet we have no difficulty accepting them as true. You cannot prove to me that you love your parents or your children. But you know that it is a fact. And I would not question you. You can try to explain the manifestations of your

love, but that would all be anecdotal and unscientific. Likewise, you cannot prove to me why you laugh when something is funny. But we all know a good joke when we hear one. The point here is that Christians should not feel pressured into thinking that our understanding of God through the Bible and through our personal experiences with Him is somehow insufficient. Nor should Christians embrace the egotistical position that unless we can “know” something, it cannot exist.

*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (Romans 1:18-20)*

NOTE: For the sake of brevity, the discussions in this article have been intended to point out basic premises that undermine some of the kinds of arguments Hitchens and Co. make., not to be a full apologetic. If anyone desires more dialogue on any of these topics, I am happy to oblige.

If this article was meaningful to you in any way, I  
would like to hear about it.

Please send any questions or comments to:

*heather@newmilkandhoney.com*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Heather Sigler is an attorney, a pastor, and the founder of New Milk & Honey. She lives in Washington, DC. Heather attended LIFE Bible College for a season before completing her undergraduate degree in Philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley. She earned her law degree from Georgetown University. Heather has an entrepreneurial spirit and loves to teach and write on topics that turn the hearts of people back to God. Her prayer is that every nonbeliever will develop a personal relationship with their Creator and that every believer will walk in the fullness of their inheritance in Christ.

Please visit [www.newmilkandhoney.org](http://www.newmilkandhoney.org) for more information on Heather's mission and ministry.