

The Making of an Atheist: How Immorality Leads to Unbelief

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Moody Publishers

Discussion Questions

Introduction

- Do you know any atheists personally? If so, how would you account for their unbelief? How might your explanation differ from theirs?
- In recent years, atheists have become more bold and aggressive in declaring their unbelief and even ridiculing people of faith. Why do you suppose this is the case?
- Spiegel asserts that atheism has given rise to “harmful ideologies” such as Marxism and nihilism. Do you consider atheists to be less trustworthy than other people? Why or why not?

Chapter 1

- What impact, if any, do you suppose the atheist ad campaigns in the U.S. and Britain will have?
- Have you read any writings of the “new atheists” (Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, Hitchens, etc.)? If so, what was your response?
- Spiegel notes that atheists most often appeal to science and the problem of evil in accounting for their refusal to believe in God. What do you think of Spiegel’s responses to these objections? What other reasons might an atheist give for his/her unbelief?
- Spiegel notes that several atheistic complaints are actually reasonable. Do you agree? Are there any other objections to religious belief or practice to which you are sympathetic?

Chapter 2

- What, if anything, does Antony Flew’s recanting of atheism suggest about the reasonableness of belief in God?
- Do you agree with Flew that the existence of the universe, the laws of nature, and the presence of life constitute the three best evidences for God? Are there any other equally conclusive evidences?
- Do you agree with Spiegel’s account of the “biblical diagnosis” of atheism? If not, why not? If so, what other biblical passages might support this account?
- Have you personally known anyone whose loss of faith has followed the pattern described by the author (where disbelief was prompted by disobedience)?
- Do you believe that naturalism is self-defeating as Plantinga claims?

Chapter 3

- Does Paul Vitz’s “defective father hypothesis” about atheism cohere with your own experience of atheists? How should this affect the way we approach those who reject God?
- Given the moral corruption of so many major Western intellectuals, as noted by Paul Johnson and E. Michael Jones, what impact, if any, should this have on our view of education and the scholarly world?
- To what extent do you think the “will to believe,” as William James calls it, is involved in your own faith? Have you ever struggled with a willful refusal to believe something that you knew was true?
- Are there any attributes of God that you struggle with or wish were not true about God? If so, why do you maintain these beliefs in spite of your desires?

Chapter 4

- How should Kuhn’s concept of paradigms affect the way we view scientists and other scholars?
- What sorts of paradigms do even non-scholars bring to experience in other contexts, such as regarding lifestyle, popular culture, and personal relationships? What can we do to become more self-aware regarding the paradigms to which we are committed?
- Do you believe in the *sensus divinitatis*, as Calvin and Plantinga describe it? If so, in what ways have you seen this natural awareness of God at work in your own life, even dating back to when you were a child?
- Plantinga suggests that our moral-spiritual practice impacts our cognitive function. What impact, if any, should this have on our approach to spiritual formation—both regarding ourselves and those to whom we minister, teach, or parent?
- At the end of the chapter, Spiegel summarizes his account of atheism. To what extent do you agree with his analysis? What would you add or subtract from his account?

Chapter 5

- Were you surprised by Matthew Parris’s reflections on Christian mission work in Africa? What lessons might we draw from his response?
- Do you agree with Spiegel’s observation that theists enjoy a “right to complain” and a “privilege to thank” God which is not available to atheists. Do you feel that you take full advantage of both of these blessings?
- How has this book affected the way you regard atheists? How has it affected your view of your own faith and fellow believers?