

# Philosophical Aikido: Using Atheism to Defeat Arguments for Atheism

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## 1 Evolutionary Atheism

- 1a. GRAND EVOLUTIONARY STORY: All of life originated from inorganic matter and evolved from simple to more complex organisms (primarily) by means of natural selection operating on random genetic mutation.
- 1b. PILLAR 1: EVOLUTIONARY ATHEISM: The grand evolutionary story is not orchestrated or superintended by God or any intelligent agent like God.
  - i. Daniel Dennett: “an impersonal, unreflective, robotic, mindless little scrap of molecular machinery is the ultimate basis of all the agency, and hence meaning, and hence consciousness, in the universe.” *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, p. 203
  - ii. Richard Dawkins: ”All appearances to the contrary, the only watchmaker in nature is the blind forces of physics, albeit deployed in a very special way. A true watchmaker has foresight: he designs his cogs and springs, and plans their interconnections, with a future purpose in his mind’s eye. Natural selection, the blind, unconscious automatic process which Darwin discovered, and which we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life, has no purpose in mind. It has no mind and no mind’s eye. It does not plan for the future. It has no vision, no foresight, no sight at all. If it can be said to play the role of watchmaker in nature, it is the blind watchmaker.” *The Blind Watchmaker*, p. 5

## 2 Evolution, Cognitive Unreliability, and Defeat

- 2a. PILLAR 2 EVOLUTIONARY ORIGIN: On atheism, it’s highly likely that we humans and our cognitive faculties are the product of evolutionary processes of the sorts described by the grand evolutionary story. (let’s call this as “E” for short)
- 2b. PILLAR 3 THESIS OF DEEP UNRELIABILITY: assuming the truth of EVOLUTIONARY ATHEISM, it’s unlikely or inscrutable that humans have much by way of reliable insight into deep, abstruse philosophical matters.
  - i. Charles Darwin: “With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust the convictions of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?”

- ii. Thomas Nagel: “Evolutionary naturalism provides an account of our capacities that undermines their reliability, and in doing so undermines itself...Mechanisms of belief formation that have selective advantage in the everyday struggle for existence do not warrant our confidence in the construction of theoretical accounts of the world as a whole.” *Mind and Cosmos*, p. 27
- iii. Patricia Churchland: “Boiled down to essentials, a nervous system enables the organism to succeed in the four F’s: feeding, fleeing, fighting and reproducing. The principle chore of nervous systems is to get the body parts where they should be in order that the organism may survive...Improvements in sensorimotor control confer an evolutionary advantage: a fancier style of representing is advantageous *so long as it is geared to the organism’s way of life and enhances the organism’s chances of survival*. Truth, whatever that is, definitely takes the hindmost.”
- 2d. PILLAR 4 PRINCIPLE OF DEFEAT: if one has good reason believe that X is unreliable concerning a particular matter, p, then one shouldn’t believe what X says about p, unless one has some other source of information to go on regarding p.

– *Examples*: Pool Thermometer, Color-perception, Calculator, Untrustworthy Una

## 3 A Smattering of Arguments for Atheism

### THE EVIDENTIAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

- 1a. If God exists, then evil doesn’t exist, unless there’s a morally sufficient reason that justifies God in allowing it.
- 2a. Evil exists.
- 3a. It’s likely that there’s no morally sufficient reason that justifies God in allowing evil.
- 4a. Therefore, it’s likely that God does not exist.

### THE ARGUMENT FROM DIVINE HIDDENNESS

- 1b. If God exists, then reasonable non-belief doesn’t exist, unless there’s a morally sufficient reason that justifies God in allowing it.
- 2b. Reasonable non-belief exists.

- 3b. It's likely that there's no morally sufficient reason that justifies God in allowing reasonable non-belief.
- 4b. Therefore, it's likely that God does not exist.

#### THE INCOHERENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF GOD

- 1c. If Christianity is true, then the Christian concept of God (omniscient, omnipotent, immaterial, necessary, etc.) is logically coherent.
- 2c. The Christian concept of God (omniscient, omnipotent, immaterial, necessary, etc.) is logically incoherent (e.g. necessarily, all minds are/grounded in matter, every being is contingent, etc.)
- 3c. Therefore, Christianity is (necessarily) false.

## 4 Philosophical Aikido and the Intellectual Bankruptcy of Evolutionary Atheism

PILLAR 5 KEY PREMISE: whether premises 3a, 3b, and 2c of the above arguments for atheism are true is a deep philosophical matter.

- Irony: If your atheism is supported by philosophical arguments that rely on one or more deep philosophical truths, then (by the PRINCIPLE OF DEFEAT) you don't have any good philosophical grounds for your atheism.

#### SUMMARY OF CORE ARGUMENT

1. It's very likely on atheism that human cognitive faculties are produced by processes described by the grand evolutionary story. [EVOLUTIONARY THESIS]
2. If so, then one has good reason to believe that it's unlikely (or inscrutable) that our faculties are reliable concerning deep, abstruse philosophical matters. [THESIS OF DEEP UNRELIABILITY]
3. If so, then one shouldn't believe what those faculties deliver about deep, abstruse philosophical matters, unless one has other information to go on. [PRINCIPLE OF DEFEAT]
4. With respect to deep, abstruse philosophical matters, atheists have no other information to go on other than what's delivered by human cognitive faculties.
5. Whether premises 3a, 3b, and 2c of the above arguments for atheism are true is a deep, abstruse philosophical matter. [textscKey Premise]
6. Therefore, atheists shouldn't believe premises 3a, 3b, and 2c.

CONCLUSION: Evolutionary atheists have reason to reject the above arguments for atheism in so far as they rest on deep, abstruse philosophical matters—for the evolutionary atheist, a philosophically grounded atheism can't even get off the ground.