

Does God exist? How can we know?
How did the universe get here?

How did people get here?

Doesn't science disprove the Bible?

Doesn't the Bible contain errors,
contradictions, and cultural biases?

Doesn't the Bible condone slavery,
discrimination, homophobia, and
even genocide?

Are there moral absolutes?



What makes Jesus different from
other great religious leaders?

Aren't there many paths to heaven?

Aren't people basically good?

Is hell real? How could a loving
God send people there?

Why is there evil and suffering
in the world?

Why are Christians such
hypocrites?

CAN WE KNOW TRUTH?

Welcome back to week 2 of our study "13 Reasons: Can we know truth?"

This week's lesson: "Humanism: running around in circles"

My assertion:

Christianity does not depend on blind faith. Instead, it can be proven true by logical reasoning, scientific investigation, and historical research.

No other religion, philosophy, or world view can make this claim. Christianity is unique in its truth.

Here's the assertion I made last week. In Christianity, we talk a lot about faith (and we should). But often we take away the wrong message. We end up believing that we need to exercise "blind faith", believing "no matter what" – that is, believing despite evidence to the contrary. We even urge people to do that, every Sunday. But I've come to believe something different: Christianity does not depend on blind faith. Instead, it can be proven true by logical reasoning, scientific investigation, and historical research. In other words, the rational evidence supports rather than contradicts our faith. The problem is that we seldom actually look at the evidence. Instead, we fall for the lie told to us by society (and often by ourselves): to believe in Christianity, you must check your brain at the door.

KEY VERSE

1 Peter 3:15 – But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an **answer** to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

Greek *apologia*, usually translated **answer** or **defense**. Conveys the sense of giving a formal account (or legal plea) for oneself, presenting evidence to prove a point

Here's our key verse again. We are called to give an *apologia* for our belief – a reasoned answer, a formal account, a legal defense. In other words, we are called to be familiar with the evidence and be ready to present that evidence (to ourselves and to others) when needed.

People almost invariably arrive at their beliefs not on the basis of proof, but on the basis of what they find attractive.

Blaise Pascal, 17th century
French mathematician, physicist,
and religious philosopher

I should clarify something. I'm **not** saying that we don't need to exercise faith. I'm **not** saying that the decision to believe is made on a purely rational basis. We can't "argue" people (including ourselves) into heaven – that's the Holy Spirit's function, and I don't want to minimize the Spirit's role.

But, as our key verse (and many other verses) asserts, we are called to give a defense of our faith – to present the logical, rational, and even scientific reasons why we believe. Christianity may still require a leap of faith, but when we honestly consider the evidence that God has given us, it is the shortest leap there is.

Does God exist? How can we know?



So here's a rather easy and straightforward question to get things started. Does God exist? How do we know?
I'll wait while you give it some thought....

Some terms:

Atheist – One who asserts that there is no God. Nothing exists outside of the known physical universe. Most modern atheists prefer to be called ***humanists***.

Agnostic – One who asserts that definite knowledge about God is unattainable.

Deist – One who asserts that God exists but does not interact with people or otherwise impact the natural world.

Naturalist – One who asserts that everything can be explained by natural (that is, scientific) principles.

Let's set that question aside for now, while we consider some definitions.

Some terms:

Humanist – One who attaches prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters, stressing the potential value and goodness of human beings and seeking rational ways of solving human problems

Secular humanism – “Human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives”

Religious humanism – “Integrate humanist ethical philosophy with congregational rituals centered on human needs, interests, and abilities.”

E.g., a majority of Unitarian-Universalist clergy are religious humanists



Nowadays, atheists prefer to be called humanists. Here’s a definition. But you don’t need me to tell you about humanism. I’m sure you’ve observed it first-hand in your job, schools, television set, social media feed, and the fabric of the culture around us. Summed up, humanism says that people, not a god or gods, is ultimate measure of all.

I found the concept of religious humanism to be especially interesting. Adherents meet in weekly services, hear sermons, and sing hymns. (I even looked at their primary hymnal – some of those hymns are in our hymnal!) But the goal of those weekly services is not the glorification of God, for in their mind He/She does not exist, but the furtherance of mankind.

**“No deity will save us;
we must save ourselves.”
Humanist Manifesto II**

Modern humanism is generally framed through three documents: the original *A Humanist Manifesto* (1933), the *Humanist Manifesto II* (1973), and *Humanism and its Aspirations* (2003, and commonly called the *Humanist Manifesto III*). This is an oft-referenced quote from the *Humanist Manifesto II* that succinctly summarizes the humanist world view.

Primary Themes of Humanism (from Humanist Manifesto III)

- Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis.
- Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of evolutionary change, an unguided process.
- Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience.
- Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals.
- Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships.
- Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness.

These themes from the *Humanist Manifesto III* capture the essence of the humanist world view.

Can we prove that God does not exist?



Now let's return to our question. Better yet, let's ask the inverse question. Hey, Mr. Humanist! Can you prove that God does not exist?

Most arguments for atheism reduce to this:

This world consists of things that we can observe and test, measure and quantify.

God can not be measured and quantified (he is, by definition, outside the natural world), therefore, he does not exist.

When it comes to a logical position on whether or not God exists, the atheist argument is usually framed like this. Note that the first part of the argument reflects a basic humanist tenet. The second statement follows from the first. And to the atheist, this second statement is “mic-drop” – it ends the discussion.

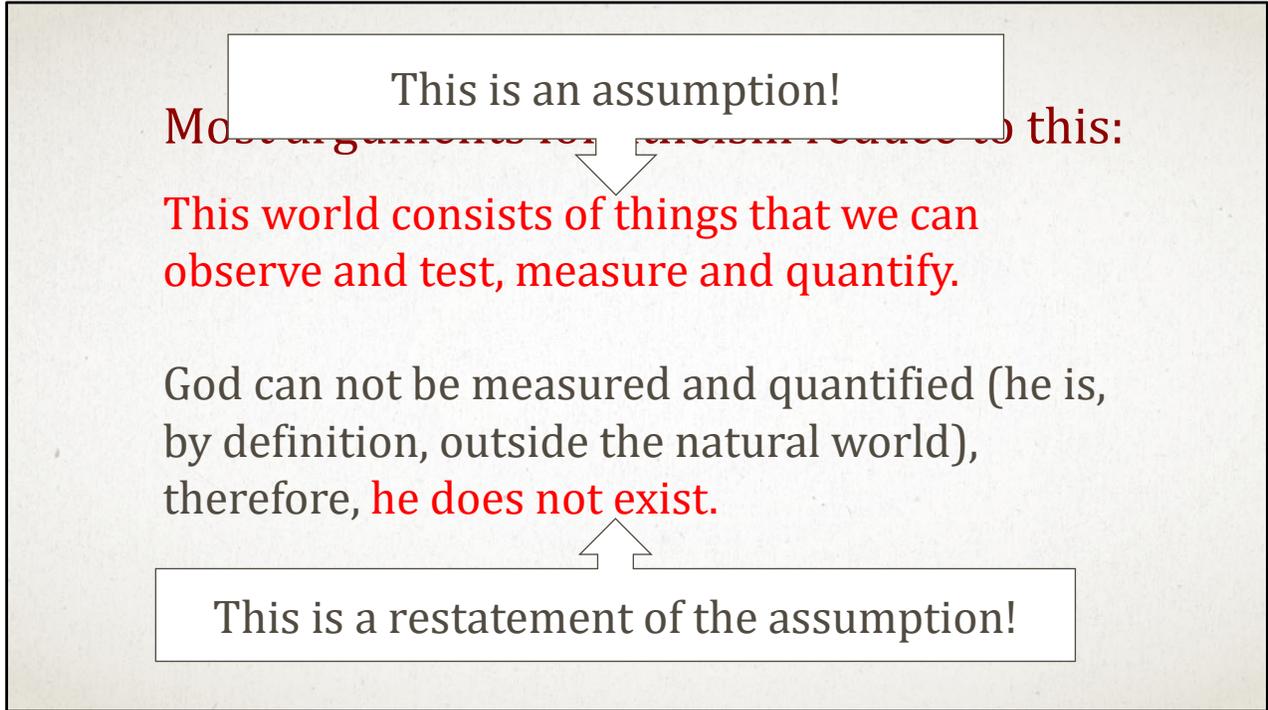
This is an assumption!

Modern arguments for theism are based on this:

This world consists of things that we can observe and test, measure and quantify.

God can not be measured and quantified (he is, by definition, outside the natural world), therefore, he does not exist.

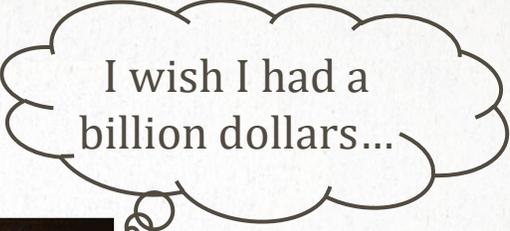
But wait! The text in red is just an assumption.



And the conclusion isn't really a logical conclusion. It's just a restatement of the assumption.

A gentle reminder:

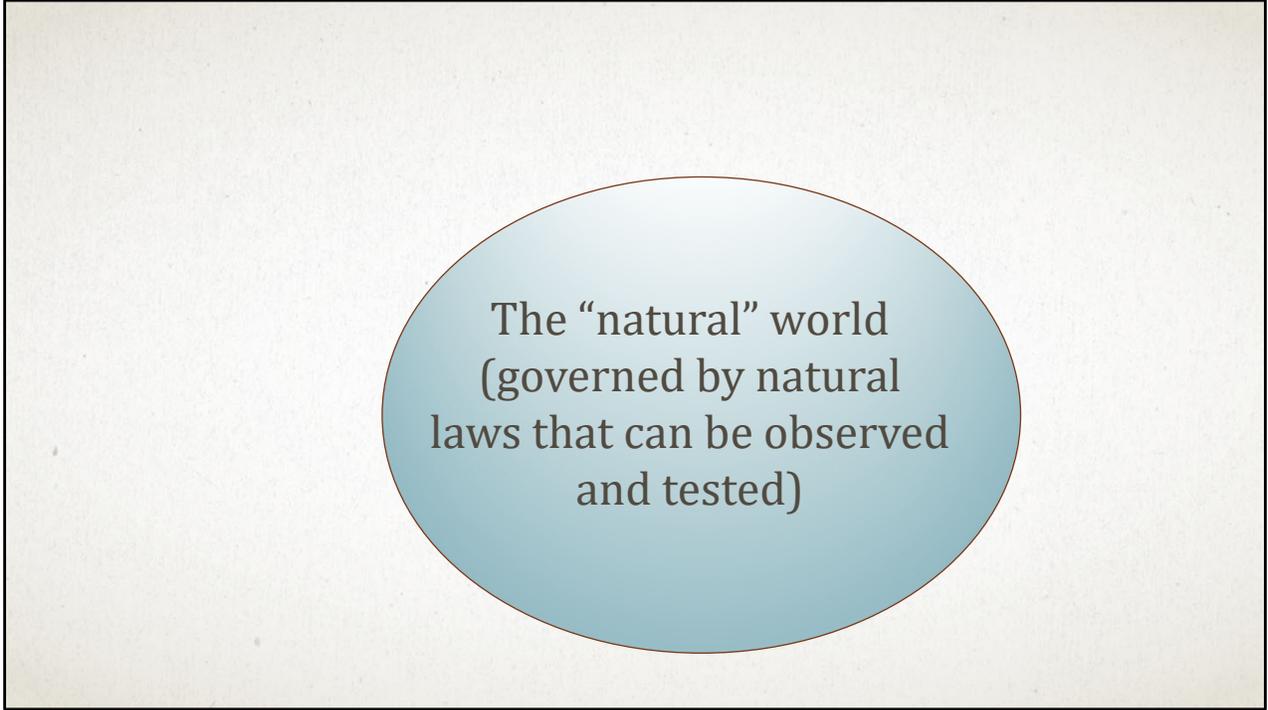
Assuming or asserting something does not make it true



I wish I had a
billion dollars...

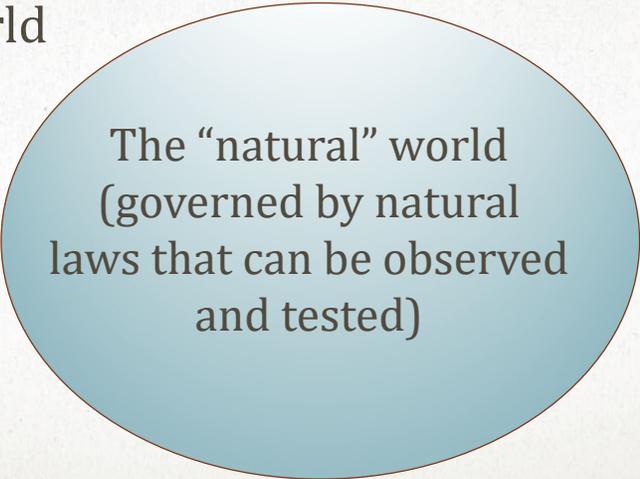


So the humanist argument assumed something was true and then used that as proof that it was true. Sorry, that's not the way the world works.



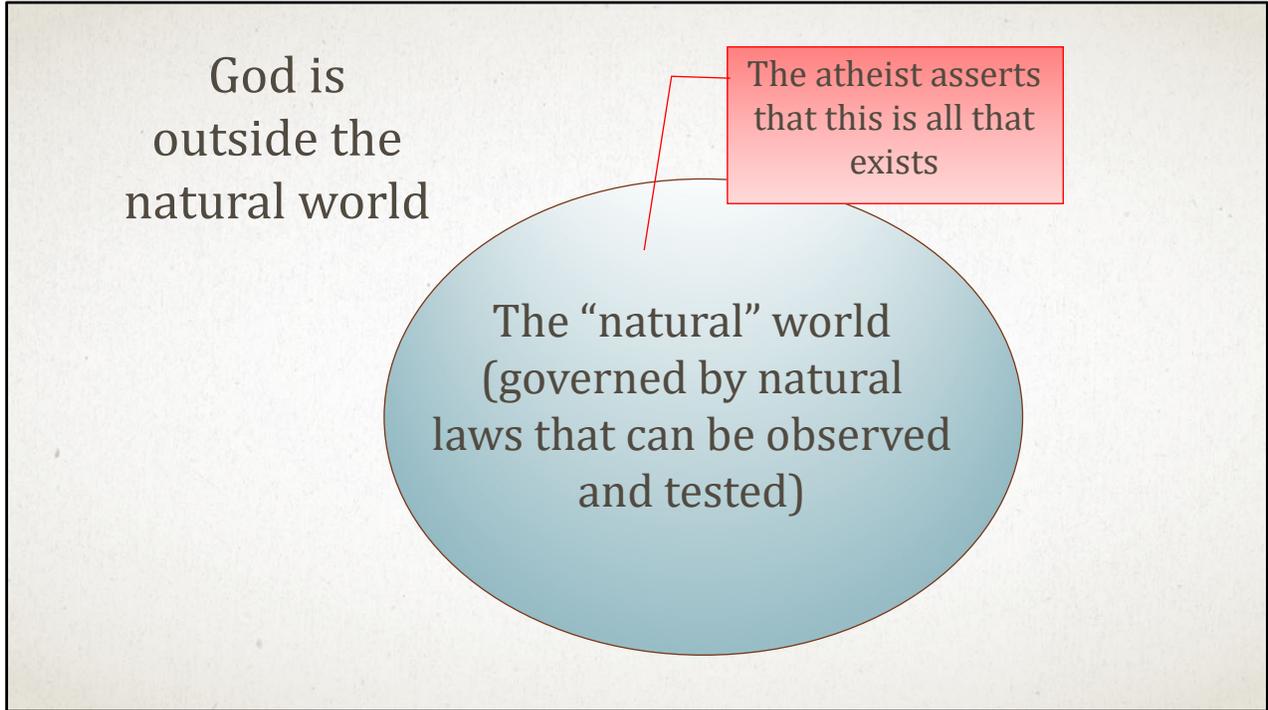
This is an important point, so we'll say it another way, using pictures.
The center oval represents the natural world – that is, the universe we live in. It's governed by natural laws that can be observed and tested.

God is
outside the
natural world

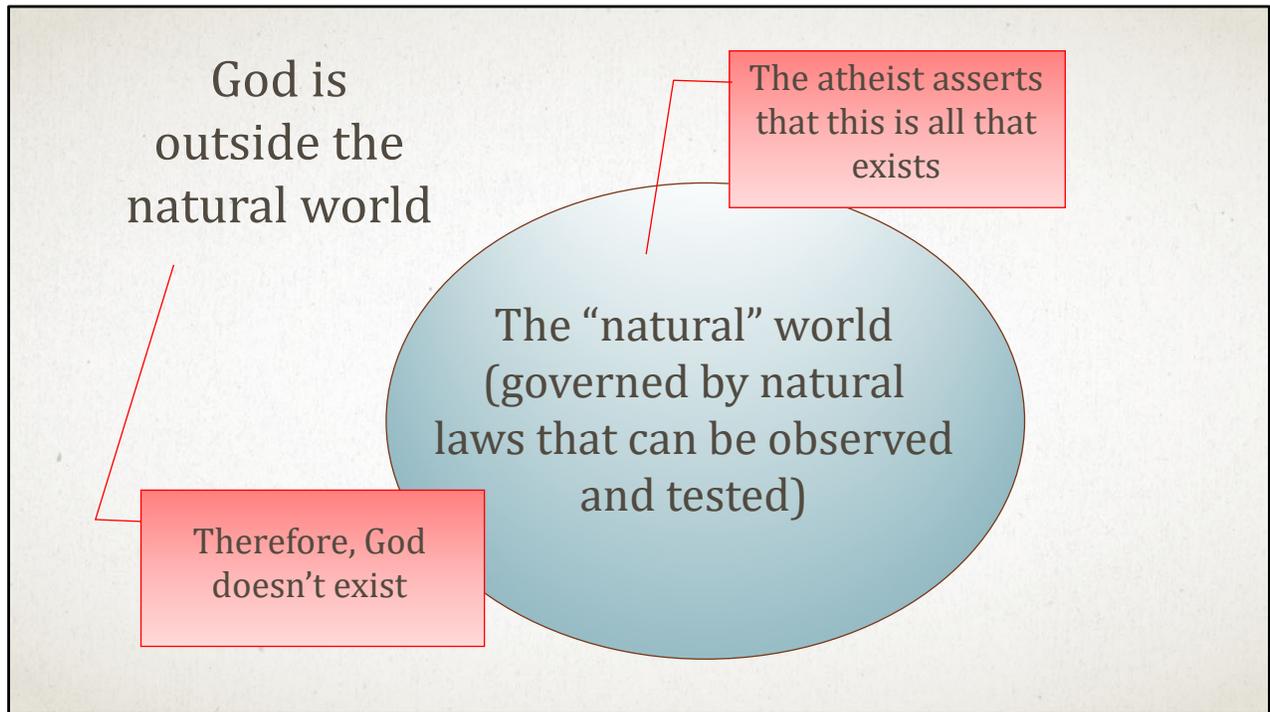


The “natural” world
(governed by natural
laws that can be observed
and tested)

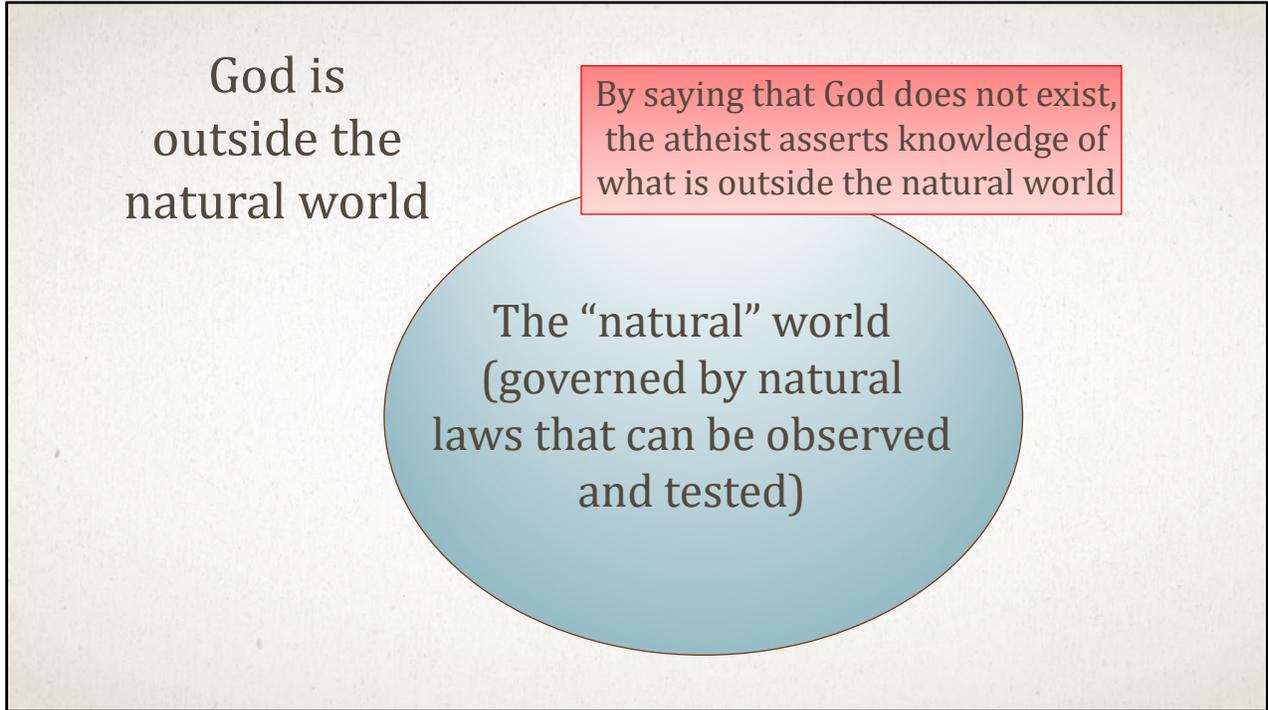
God, if he exists, is outside the natural world. He is not governed by natural laws.
(That’s the definition of God!)



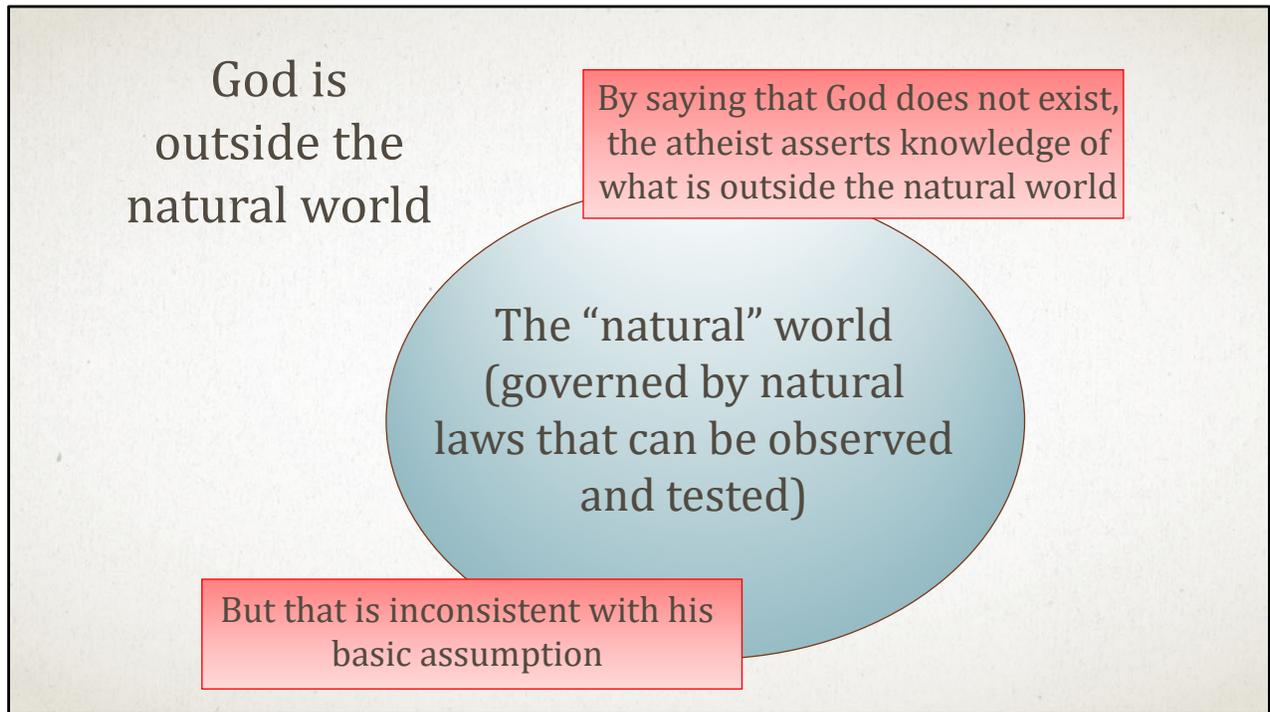
The atheist, or humanist, asserts that the natural world is all that exists. There is nothing outside the blue oval.



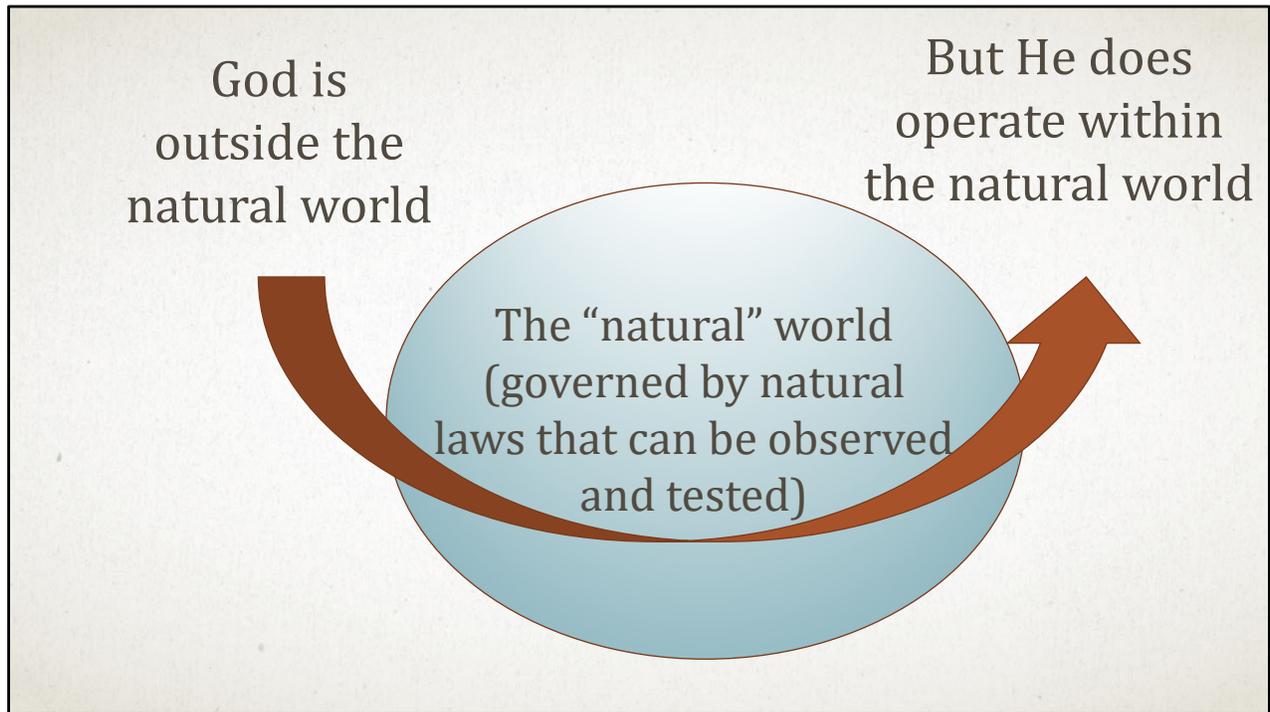
Therefore, since there is nothing outside the blue oval, God does not exist. Again, this is circular reasoning. We assume there is nothing outside the natural world, which we take as proof that there is nothing outside the natural world.



But the logical fallacy runs even deeper. In assuming that there is nothing outside the oval, the atheist is asserting knowledge of what is outside the oval.



But that is inconsistent with his basic assumption that there is nothing outside the oval. In other words, you must have knowledge of what's outside the oval to state that there is nothing outside the oval – but that knowledge would be outside the oval! This is a logical paradox.



But the Christian paradigm is different. God is outside the natural world, and not bound by the natural world. But God does operate within the natural world as He wishes. Because of this, we can have some knowledge about things outside the natural world. There is no paradox.

**The Bible's assessment of the
atheist's claim:**

“The fool hath said in his heart,
There is no God” (Psalms 14:1,
Psalms 53:1)



The Psalm writer summed it up quite nicely. Contrast this to the previous quote from the *Humanist Manifesto II*.

Primary Themes of Humanism (from Humanist Manifesto III)

- Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis.
- Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of evolutionary change, an unguided process.
- Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience.
- Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals.
- Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships.
- Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness.

But let's dig a little deeper. Remember those primary themes of Humanism?

Primary Themes of Humanism (from Humanist Manifesto III)

- Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis.
- Humans are an integral part of nature and the process of change, an unguided process.
- Ethical values are derived from human experience.
- Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals.
- Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships.
- Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness.

Despite the implication, this assumption does not and cannot say anything about the existence of God

The first statement is the same assumption that we just examined. The humanist uses it to imply that there is no God. But as we saw, it is an assertion, and does not and cannot prove anything about the existence of God.

Primary Themes of Humanism (from Humanist Manifesto III)

- Knowledge of the world is derived from experimentation, and rational analysis. We'll examine this more in the upcoming weeks...
- Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of evolutionary change, an unguided process. ...but it's also important now
- Ethical values are derived from human experience.
- Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals.
- Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships.
- Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness.

This is the theme that ties humanism to evolution. We'll examine this connection quite extensively in the upcoming weeks. For now, focus on the concept that humans are the result of an unguided, totally naturalistic process.

Primary Themes of Humanism (from Humanist Manifesto III)

- Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis.
- Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of evolutionary change, an unguided process.
- Ethical values are derived from human experience.
- Life's fulfillment emerges from individualistic effort, service of humane ideals.
- Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships.
- Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness.

Both the humanist and the Christian agree with this – but the Christian includes a relationship with God as the primary focus of the theme

And point five is one that both humanists and the Christian can agree on – but not really.

Primary Themes of Humanism (from Humanist Manifesto III)

- Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis.
- Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of evolutionary change, an unguided process. **But what about these?**
- Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience.
- Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals.
- Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships.
- Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness.

Let's consider these other three themes, with a discussion of ethics.

Humanism and Ethics

Humanism says...

- Ethical values derive from overarching human needs
- Happiness and fulfillment come from working for humanity's greater good

This block summarizes the three themes. While humanism doesn't believe in God, it does not espouse a lawless, "do what you want" ethical framework. (Well, there are some that use the veil of humanism to mask a libertine lifestyle, but let's not focus on the bad apples.)

Instead, ethical values derive from overarching human needs. Right and wrong are determined not by the desires of individuals or the pronouncements of an arbitrary superbeing, but by what is best for humanity.

Happiness and fulfillment come from striving towards the ideal ethical values.

Humanism and Ethics

Evolution says...

- “Good” behavior is driven by the survival and reproduction of the individual
- Values, happiness, fulfillment are artificial constructs

Humanism says...

- Ethical values derive from overarching human needs
- Happiness and fulfillment come from working for humanity’s greater good

Let’s compare that to what evolution says. Remember, a primary theme of humanism is that we are the result of naturalistic, unguided processes. “Right” and “wrong” are driven by whether the behavior gives an evolutionary advantage – that is, whether it increases the chances that an individual organism will survive and reproduce. Of course, “right” and “wrong” are in quotes because there is no value judgement beyond evolutionary advantage. Nature doesn’t know “right” or “wrong” – only “more survivable” or “less survivable”. Terms like happiness and fulfillment are artificial constructs.

Humanism and Ethics

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- Ethical values derive from overarching human needs
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These two frameworks are
inconsistent with each
other



The two frameworks are very different. In the humanist framework, ethical values derive from what is best for the whole. In the evolutionary framework, ethical values derive from what is best for the individual. And by “best”, we mean “gives an evolutionary advantage” – that is, increases an organism’s ability to survive and reproduce. These two frameworks are inconsistent with each other. We’ll illustrate this by considering one ethical area – monogamy.

Is monogamy “good”?

Humanism: Monogamy is an ethical virtue because monogamous relationships are best for humanity



Let's keep it simple – for this discussion, monogamy speaks of the fidelity of people to their mates. The issue isn't whether people are monogamous in practice. It is whether people should aspire to be monogamous. That is, whether monogamy should be considered an ethical virtue.

So, is monogamy “good”? Humanists almost universally answer affirmatively – monogamy is an ethical virtue because monogamous relationship are best for humanity. What is ethically right is determined by considering what it best for mankind in general. Society is better off when people are monogamous.

Is monogamy “good”?

Humanism: Monogamy is an ethical virtue because monogamous relationships are best for humanity

Evolution: Monogamy interferes with an individual’s drive to “survive and reproduce”



But evolution is all about “survive and reproduce” for the individual, not the group. An evolutionary advantage is gained if a person is not monogamous, but instead can switch partners at any time if a “better” one came along.

Evolutionists and humanists have long struggled with this one. I read several studies trying to explore how monogamy in primates could lead to an evolutionary advantage. But ultimately, the studies all failed. If evolution is true, monogamy is not a virtue, but a hindrance.

From “Humans aren’t designed to be happy – so stop trying”

theconversation.com, 19 July 2019

Happiness is a human construct, an abstract idea with no equivalent in actual human experience. Positive and negative affects do reside in the brain, but sustained happiness has no biological basis.

Humans are not designed [by evolution] to be happy, or even content. Instead, we are designed primarily to survive and reproduce, like every other creature in the natural world. A state of contentment is discouraged by nature because it would lower our guard against possible threats to our survival.

Here’s a telling article from a science on-line magazine, theconversation.com. In the evolutionary paradigm, concepts like “happiness” don’t exist. So therefore they shouldn’t exist in the humanist paradigm, either.

Humanism and Ethics

Evolution says...

- “Good” behavior is driven by the survival and reproduction of the individual
- Values, happiness, fulfillment are artificial constructs

Humanism says...

- Ethical values derive from overarching human needs
- Happiness and fulfillment come from working for humanity’s greater good

Christianity says...

- Ethical values derive from the Creator, reflecting His characteristics
- Happiness and fulfillment come from aligning our behaviors to those ethical values



Humanist ethics are an attempt to replicate religious ethics



So where does humanism get its value determination, if not from evolution? It seems obvious that the humanist view of ethics is an attempt to replicate the Christian view of ethics – but with “Creator” crossed out and replaced by “humanity”. It replaces “God” with “man”, just as it promises.

Is monogamy “good”?

Humanism: Monogamy is an ethical virtue because monogamous relationships are best for humanity

Evolution: Monogamy interferes with an individual’s drive to “survive and reproduce”

Christianity: Monogamy is an ethical virtue because God is faithful, and we are made in His image, so we are to be faithful



Back to our monogamy question. Christianity says that monogamy is an ethical virtue – but the reasons ultimately derive not from man but from God. God is faithful, and since we are made in His image, we are to be faithful. The source of monogamy’s “goodness” is not man, but God’s nature.

Furthermore, because we are made in God’s image, we are innately aware of this ethical framework. We fundamentally know right from wrong (even as we fail to act consistent with those virtues). We’ll explore this more next time.

Of course, this is just one example. We could spend an entire class, or maybe an entire lifetime, examining other ethical issues. The takeaway is this: The humanist ethical framework collapses because it is ultimately at odds with its own foundational statement. Evolution cares only about “survive and reproduce” for the individual, not the abstract betterment of society.

Atheism (or humanism) can't
prove that there isn't a God.

But can we prove that
there is a God?

(and if so, what is He like?)

Okay. So atheism, or humanism, can't prove that there ISN'T a God. But can we prove that there IS a God? We'll tackle that question next week...