

**RELIGION, TRUTH, AND VALUE WITHOUT GOD:
CONTEMPORARY ATHEISM SPEAKS OUT INHUMANIST
MANIFESTO 2000 Part 2**

by Bob and Gretchen Passantino

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“Humanism is an ethical, scientific, and philosophical outlook that has changed the world...[expressing] a renewed confidence in the power of human beings to solve their own problems and conquer uncharted frontiers.”¹ This bold Star Trekque statement of religion, truth, and value without God is proposed by the *Humanist Manifesto 2000 (HM2K)* as the only adequate worldview. Humanism, as used in *HM2K* and elsewhere, dismisses belief in God as irrational and irrelevant. Those who reject belief in God call themselves by various names (atheist, agnostic, God-doubter, skeptic, secular humanist, etc.), but the term *humanist* is an umbrella term including most such people.

The postmodernist *humanists*, *subjectivists*, or *relativists*, critiqued in Part One of this article, believe knowledge of God’s existence is not possible; that without any foundational or overarching (transcendental) source, truth, morality, value, and meaning cannot be absolute but only relative (to oneself, one’s culture, a historical epoch, an evolutionary stage, etc.). This worldview is easy to refute. Even the objectivist, absolutist humanists accurately reject postmodern humanism. Postmodern humanism is self-refuting: its absolute truth is that there is no absolute truth; its absolute ethic is that all ethics are relative; and its objective worldview is that all worldviews are subjective.

The second category of humanists holds a worldview of objectivity, absolute truth, and moral absolutism. Their most visible organ is the *Free Inquiry* magazine, which published *HM2K* and whose editor-in-chief is the *HM2K*’s author, Dr. Paul Kurtz. The first part of this article quoted extensively from an issue of *Free Inquiry* devoted to refuting postmodern humanism.²

HM2K is divided into 10 sections: Preamble (1); Prospects for a Better Future (2); Scientific Naturalism (3); Benefits of Technology (4); Ethics and Reason (5); A Universal Commitment to Humanity as a Whole (6); A Planetary Bill of Rights and Responsibilities (7); A New Global Agenda (8); A Need for New Planetary Institutions (9); and Optimism about the Human Prospect (10). The antitheistic arguments woven through this document are representative of contemporary nontheistic beliefs.

The Preamble summarizes the metamorphosis of *HM2K* through its four previous versions, *Humanist Manifesto I* (1933), *Humanist Manifesto II* (1973), *A Secular Humanist Declaration* (1980), and *A Declaration of Interdependence* (1988). Citing the continuity of worldview and the changes in the world over seven decades, the Preamble rejects any religious worldview as divisive and premodern, concluding that “the realities of the global society are such that only a new Planetary Humanism can provide meaningful directions for the future.”³

Prospects for a Better Future rejects the sinfulness of humanity, the need for salvation, and God’s direction of human history according to a benevolent plan of redemption. *HM2K* places its faith in human reason and science, focusing on numerous historical and scientific advances in human civilization and on numerous lingering or newly emerging problems, especially those attributed to the continuing presence and influence of religion.⁴

The solution to human problems is found in human endeavor coupled with scientific naturalism, producing the benefits of technology in a context of reason and human-based ethics. This will be accomplished by human effort without regard for the existence of God.

Arguments against the Existence of God

Despite the variety of arguments against the existence of God, most can be divided into four categories: (1) language and knowledge, (2) ethics and morals, (3) science and scientific methods, and (4) logic and reasoning.

We are *not* addressing here popular arguments God-doubters raise that question the trustworthiness of Scripture, the nature of revelation, or the life and work of Jesus Christ. These are important issues but do not bear directly on the existence of God.⁵

Common Assumptions

In dialogue with Christians, modernist (as opposed to postmodernist) humanists agree on certain assumptions or presuppositions: reality exists; at least one mind exists; truth is absolute and can be known; logic and reasoning (rational inquiry) are tools to help discover truth; communication is possible; and there are valid ways to test conclusions.

While the humanist assumes these factors as “the inherent properties of matter,” or “an evolutionary survival mechanism,” and so forth, the Christian knows the assumptions are based on the eternal, infinite, unchanging, rational, and moral nature, character, and power of God. Because the human mind and the material world bear the creative, rational imprint of God, we are capable of meaningful contemplation of reality and can know that reality reflects the rational, orderly, predictable design of God.

Problems of Language and Knowledge

The argument from language and knowledge, as commonly stated, says “God-talk is meaningless.” It is believed that we can never know about God to talk about Him meaningfully, or our experience with God is beyond our mental and linguistic ability to understand or express.

This argument is self-refuting or self-contradictory because the humanist’s very assertion is talk about God. God has created humans with the capacity for meaningful language that can describe nonmaterial realities (e.g., concepts, numbers, and God). There is evidence of God’s power and nature through the design and order of the material world. Most importantly, God became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:1–18).

Problems of Ethics and Morals

Humanists often pose an indictment of God’s own moral character called the Problem of Evil.⁶ It is usually stated as follows:

1. An all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing God would eradicate all evil.
2. Evil exists.
3. Therefore, God either does not exist, or is missing at least one of the attributes of total goodness, power, or knowledge.

Christian theists have responded for centuries with convincing evidence and argumentation.⁷ First, if the existence of evil in the world *proves* that God *does not* exist, then how does the humanist account for the good in the world? Does the good in the world *prove* that God *does* exist? This “Problem of Good” is an unanswerable objection alerting us that the argument is not reasonable.

The humanist has omitted important factors accounting for evil in the world, including (1) the nature of free moral agents; (2) the consequences of their actions; (3) the manner and time in which God judges evil and rewards innocent suffering. God did not create evil, evil beings, or beings who could perform only evil acts. He created morally responsible agents who violated His ethical standard and performed evil, with evil consequences. That the evil is not instantly rectified speaks more to God’s patient grace than to any supposed impotence.

When human moral agency and ultimate judgment and reconciliation over time are considered, the “Problem of Evil” evaporates. Norman Geisler reframes it:

1. God is all good and desires to defeat evil.
2. God is all powerful and is able to defeat evil.
3. Evil is not *yet* defeated.
4. Therefore, it will one day be defeated.⁸

While Christians insist there is one universal standard of ethics coming from God, humanists argue that the wide variety of ethical systems, along with the diversity of arguments about ethics, proves that there is no universal, God-given standard of ethics.

Even the absolutist humanists recognize the fallacious nature of this argument. *HM2K* states, “The basic principles of moral conduct are common to all civilizations — whether religious or not. Moral tendencies are deeply rooted in human nature and have evolved throughout human history....People of different socio-cultural backgrounds do in fact apply similar general moral principles....”⁹

The mere existence of competing ethical systems says nothing about the existence of one universal, abstract, invariant, eternal, and just system of ethics from God. The humanist accounts for the basic consistency as a result of naturalism. Christian theism more reasonably attributes absolute ethics to the personal, moral God who has instilled His moral agents with conscience and the ability to recognize and be held accountable to His standard.

Humanists argue that the many biblical and historical examples of unethical behavior by supposed believers in God is hypocritical and proves the irrelevance of God’s existence. In response, neither good nor bad “fellow travelers” validate or invalidate the existence of God-given ethics any more than moral atheists prove the atheist position. For every Judas in Christianity there is a Stalin among atheists. Christian theism commands, promotes, and nurtures the virtuous life. Nevertheless, the existence of a biblical Good Samaritan or a historical Mother Theresa doesn’t prove Christian theism. Neither is atheism justified by the existence of “countless millions of humanists [who] have led exemplary lives, been responsible citizens...and contributed significantly to the moral enhancement of society.”¹⁰

Christians derive moral standards from God, Himself the supreme moral agent, and so we have confidence that morality is a genuine reflection of goodness, truth, and value. Morality is not reducible to a random product of chance, an illusion, or a mechanistic survival system. Absolute, universal, invariant, and abstract ethics cannot be accounted for in a purely material universe. Ultimately, the atheist must simply have “blind faith” in virtue. Nowhere does *HM2K* justify its absolute morals; it simply asserts “key principles of the ethics of humanism,” such as freedom of choice, respect for others, commitment to excellence, and so forth.¹¹

The humanist faith in ethics is essentially a “leap in the dark,” and not a firm commitment based on an adequate explanation. Humanists are left with a naïve recognition of ethical boundaries for which they can give no explanation, but which they are unwilling to surrender: “Humanists argue that we should respect an ethic of principles.”¹²

Some humanists attack objectivist ethics grounded in God by divorcing the ethical standard from God altogether. This sort of argument is presented by atheist Michael Martin, professor of philosophy at Boston University. Martin tries to deflect the Christian critique of atheist ethics in “Atheism, Christian Theism, and Rape.”¹³ He summarizes his understanding of two Christian objections to atheistic ethics: (1) Christians accuse atheistic ethics of being relative (dependent on something or someone in particular, like an individual’s preferences or a society’s heritage) and thus not binding; or (2) being

objective (independent of something or someone in particular, like “It’s always wrong to torture innocent children”) and thus admitting of some absolute, eternal, invariant, universal, and abstract standard beyond the mere material universe (a standard Christians say can only come from God’s moral character).

Martin then uses the same kinds of arguments to critique Christian theism. He argues against the idea that theistic morality is always presupposed:

Let us assume for the moment that the Biblical position on rape is clear: God condemns rape. But why? One possibility is that He condemns rape because it is wrong. Why is it wrong? It might be supposed that God has various reasons for thinking rape is wrong....However, if these reasons provide objective grounds for God thinking that rape is wrong, then they provide objective grounds for others as well. Moreover, these reasons would hold even if God did not exist. Thus, on this assumption...atheists could provide objective ground for condemning rape — the same grounds used by God.¹⁴

Second, Martin argues that if ethics are *not* foundational outside of God, then they are arbitrary and need no justification at all:

Let us suppose now that rape is wrong because God condemns it. In this case, God has no reasons for His condemnations. His condemnation makes rape wrong and it would not be wrong if God did not condemn it. Indeed, not raping someone would be wrong if God condemned not raping. However, this hardly provides objective grounds for condemning rape. Whether rape is right or wrong would be based on God’s arbitrary condemnation. On this interpretation, if atheists can provide no objective grounds for condemning rape, they are no worse off than theists.¹⁵ (emphasis in original)

Martin cites these two options as the only valid ones regarding God and ethics. Although he acknowledges that theists argue a third position — “by basing morality on the necessary attributes of God’s character”¹⁶ — he wrongly concludes that even that argument distills to God’s character being moral because it conforms to an outside standard (to which the atheist can appeal as well) or because it is God’s will, which Martin consigns to the arbitrary category.

Martin’s argument is a false choice. He limits our choices to two (apart from God or arbitrary) and then asks us to pick one of the two choices. Christian theists do not agree that ethics fit either of these two categories.

The first category, that ethics are apart from God and justified by reason or effect, is an argument for *teleological* (“end justifying the means”) ethics. Martin may argue that rape is wrong because “it violates the victim’s rights, it traumatizes the victim, it undermines the fabric of society,”¹⁷ but he has merely pushed the source of an absolute standard back one level — who says violating a victim’s rights is wrong? Why is it wrong to traumatize victims? Why does it matter if the fabric of society is undermined?

Martin's ethical system is also overturned by *any* mixed consequences. An action is no longer inherently moral or immoral, it is only moral or immoral because of its consequences. So, for example, Martin would be hard pressed to support his system that condemns rape for its negative consequences when some rapes could have some positive consequences (clues from the rape result in the capture of the rapist before he can rape again; the child born from rape might turn out to be a much-loved adopted child; etc.). In a Christian *deontological* (absolute) ethic derived from God's character such consequences don't *justify* the bad act; but in Martin's system of "reasonable" ethics, they could.

Martin's saying that ethics from God are merely arbitrary does not deal with the Judeo-Christian argument that the standard is a reflection of God's moral character, not His mere will.¹⁸ Christian theism understands that God's moral character is essential to His very nature and is not willed by Him. In Christian theism, it's the other way around from what Martin suggests. God's will is bound by His nature — He cannot will to sin; He cannot will to cease existing; He cannot will to suspend the laws of logic; and so on. He is the source for absolute ethics by nature, not by will.

Problems of Science and Scientific Methods

HM2K is representative of the majority of God-doubters who seek to dismiss the existence of God by dismissing any way to discern His immaterial existence other than through material means. This is an arbitrary restriction with no more force than claiming that elephants don't exist because we haven't found any by gazing into our crystal ball. *HM2K* states these restrictions dogmatically:

Scientific naturalism enables human beings to construct a coherent worldview disentangled from metaphysics or theology and based on the sciences.

First, scientific naturalism is committed to a set of methodological prescriptions. For methodological naturalism, all hypotheses and theories must be tested experimentally by reference to natural causes and events....

Scientific naturalists hold a form of nonreductive materialism; natural processes and events are best accounted for by reference to material causes. (emphasis in original)¹⁹

Two problems are immediately apparent with the humanist worship of naturalism. First, humanists give no foundation for their assumption that naturalism and science are the only valid constructs by which to understand reality. If inductive empiricism is the only valid test for truth, then how is that principle itself tested? Empirically? That would be circular. In some other way? Then empiricism is *not* the only way. Actually, humanists *do not* cling solely to empiricism since they must use the laws of logic (logical inference) to make any sense out of what they observe; they must assume the laws of logic in their use of science. If the humanist admits that empiricism alone is inadequate, then he (or she) opens the door to test methods by which God's existence is confirmed.

Second, humanists have ignored the empirical evidence from which we can logically infer God's existence. These include the design evident in the universe and the historical evidence for the incarnation, death, and resurrection of "God manifest in the flesh" (John 1:1–14).²⁰

This is not the forum for a lengthy scientific analysis of humanism's inadequate naturalism. Others have addressed this issue at length, conclusively making the case that humanism cannot reject the existence of God based on scientific assumptions or evidence.²¹

Problems of Logic and Reasoning

This category is foundational to the rest. Every nontheistic argument is based on certain assumptions, or presuppositions, without which any argumentation, scientific inquiry, moral judgment, or even language would be impossible.

First, the humanist assumes that *something* exists (even if only himself). Second, he assumes that it is possible *to know* at least some things. Third, he assumes that *reason* is foundational to the knowing process, essential for discovering truth. Fourth, he has some idea of the *kinds of proofs or evidences* he thinks are reliable indicators of reality.

The acceptance of these assumptions is an admission that there are universal, invariant, and abstract principles qualitatively different than anything that can be accounted for merely by matter, energy, and motion over time; in other words, by the material universe, which is the only reality admitted by the humanist. These *transcendental* principles reflect purposefulness and are therefore meaningless without a *transcendental* Being whose inherent, eternal mindfulness establishes the foundation upon which the house of reason is based. They are the *preconditions* of any actual intelligibility.

Humanists disallow any consideration of reality apart from material existence. They are convinced the only kinds of proofs or tests for discovering or understanding reality are *empirical*, or sense-oriented. They fail to recognize the obvious: the best empirical test in the world only has significance when it is applied to the material world *and the resulting observations are interpreted by logical analysis*.

For example, to determine how many chairs are in a room, one can use his eyes (a sense) to count (a logical, mathematical process) the chairs (material things). Testing a statement about something *intangible* or immaterial doesn't combine the empirical with the rational. In such cases sense-oriented tests are actually inappropriate. To answer a historical question, such as whether Abraham Lincoln was the sixteenth president, one cannot depend on sensory experiments but must use historical investigation. To determine the relationship among the ratios 1:2, 2:4, and 4:8 is not decided by counting sticks, but by logical deduction.

Someone convinced that empirical or "scientific" tests are always adequate possesses a belief that is actually self-contradictory, or self-refuting. Once this is established, the

Christian can present a powerful argument for the existence of God called, appropriately, the *transcendental* argument.

Any humanist who has faith in science also has faith in the laws of logic, the scientific principle that the future will be like the past, and in other “natural laws.” He fails, however, to account either for the principles (laws) themselves, or for his ability to reason objectively (make sense) from his observations.

The humanist says he believes things will happen because of “the regularity of the universe,” but he is assuming what he is trying to prove. He says he can accurately observe laws and principles in the universe, but when he is asked why, he answers it is because of the laws and principles. He argues in a circle.

The humanist believes that outside the universe there is no eternal mind that produced and rationally governs the universe. He believes the universe “just is,” or what we observe is “the inherent properties of matter,” “just the way things are,” or “merely what happened.” The humanist has no foundation or explanation for what he accepts.

Whether Christian or humanist, we can only make sense of our observations and recognize principles by using the laws of logic. These laws are abstract (nonmaterial), invariant (will not change), universal (not based upon a particular, but applicable to all things), and eternal (independent of the finite universe). The laws of logic cannot come about by material, finite means because they are categorically different.

You can’t pour a law of logic into a glass. You can’t see a law of logic evolving in matter. (You can, however, *use* the laws of logic along with observation to determine how much water a glass will hold.)

The humanist’s faith is based on his belief that nonrational causes cause rational beings (humans with minds) who are themselves composed entirely of the nonrational, and yet are somehow able to step outside of that nonrationality and reason to the conclusion that *everything* is material and therefore nonrational. Yet, if the nonrational material universe is “the whole show,” the humanist could never actually know if he is truly rational or only a nonrational material product with the illusion of rationality.

What is more reasonable to believe, that the nonrational produces the rational; or that a rational being (God) created other rational beings (humans) and a world founded on rational principles that can therefore be understood by these rational beings? The humanist must borrow from the theistic, Christian worldview, which can account for rationality. It is ironic that humanists often accuse Christians of possessing blind faith, when Christians have justification for the scientific method, while the humanist only has blind faith that the nonrational can produce the rational. Christianity gives birth to science, while humanism only gives birth to blindness.²²

Arguments for the Existence of God

There are many demonstrations of the existence of God in addition to the transcendental argument. Some argue from *design*. God's nature is reflected in his creation, much as a book reflects the ideas of an author, and yet no one would believe that a book was produced by blind, mindless chance over time.

An argument from *causation* says that every effect must have a cause (and some effects are also causes of other effects). Since everything we can test in the material world is an effect (and therefore finite, not eternal), we must eventually arrive at the existence of a grand cause that is not an effect itself, God.

An argument from *motion* states that since the energy in the universe is not eternal (and is becoming more and more unusable), and could not have caused itself (nonexistence cannot "cause" anything), it must come from something (or Someone) eternal, God.

A *moral* argument says that values such as beauty, justice, and love are eternal values reflective of an eternal moral agent, God.²³

Despite the rejection of the existence of God based on what at first appear to be sophisticated philosophical and scientific arguments, atheism is a worldview that cannot account for the very universe in which we live, much less the immaterial aspects of reality such as minds, logic, ethics — even numbers, concepts, and thoughts. The best efforts of contemporary God-doubters, exemplified by *HM2K*, will not be able to resolve these inherent contradictions in their worldview. They can only point to how many prestigious philosophers, scientists, and world leaders agree with them that the naked Emperor is indeed resplendently clothed.

The apostle Paul argued to the Greek God-doubters of his day, "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things...in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:24–28a NKJV)

Bob and Gretchen Passantino, codirectors of Answers In Action, have spent more than 25 years in Christian apologetics. Through regular interaction with humanists and people of other faiths, they train Christians to defend the faith biblically and rationally.

NOTES

- 1 Paul Kurtz, "Humanist Manifesto 2000," *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1999, 4.
- 2 "What Happened to Truth? The Postmodernist Attack on Science, Morality, and Common Sense," *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1998.
- 3 *HM2K*, 6.

- 4 Ibid., 8.
- 5 Atheists often raise such “red herrings,” as Frank Zindler did in *Atheism vs. Christianity* with William Lane Craig. His extraneous arguments were answered in Bob and Gretchen Passantino’s *Atheism vs. Christianity: A Response to the Unanswered Questions* (Costa Mesa, CA: Answers In Action, 1993).
- 6 Two popular forms are “The Evidential Argument from Evil” by Nicholas Tattersall (http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/nicholas_tattersall/evil.html) and “The Arguments from Evil and Nonbelief” by Theodore Drange (http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/theodore_drange/aeandb.html).
- 7 See Norman Geisler’s “Evil, Problem of,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 219–24.
- 8 Ibid., 221.
- 9 *HM2K*, 10.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid., 11.
- 13 (http://infidels.org/library/modern/michael_martin/rape.html), 1–8.
- 14 Ibid., 3.
- 15 Ibid., 4.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid., 3.
- 18 See Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); and Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), especially chaps. 13-15.
- 19 *HM2K*, 9.
- 20 See Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).
- 21 See J. P. Moreland, *Christianity and the Nature of Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).
- 22 This argument was presented forcefully by Greg Bahnsen in his debate with Gordon Stein 11 February 1985 at the University of California, Irvine. The tapes are available from the Covenant Media Foundation (www.cmfnow.com). Other philosophers who have argued along similar lines include C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1960, especially chaps. 2-5) and Richard Purtill, *Reason to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).
- 23 Further reading includes Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1976); Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999); Norman Geisler, *Thomas*

Aquinas (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); Terry Miethe and Antony Flew, *Does God Exist: A Believer and an Atheist Debate* (San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1991); and J. P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen, *Does God Exist: The Great Debate* (Albany, NY: Prometheus, 1990).