

## **Are Atheists for Real?**

James Lynn Smith

(10 minutes)

Voices: 1. Narrator, 2. Mary, 3. John, 4. Harry

Narrator: Attention - This readers' skit is for mature audiences only. If you are offended by raw mental exposure and explicit thought performance, you should leave now.

Question: Is there really such thing as an atheist? There are indeed many professed atheists. But what is the validity of their position? What is it they don't believe ... or do believe? Mary and John have just been to a symposium on the conflicts of religious cultures. They meet outside the college administration building. Later they are joined by Harry.

Mary: Hey John, did you hear the talk at the symposium? This guy Dr. Penn has scads of degrees. And they say he is a true blue atheist. He really let the religions of the world have it. To him, religion seems to be the root of all evil.

John: Well, yes I heard. He's very scholarly, but his agenda seems to require you to put on blinders.

Mary: You mean he is wrong in what he said?

John: Oh he has good points, but they are arranged to lead you only to his conclusions. There's more than one interpretation for some things.

Mary: Like how religion fosters a "better than thou" attitude where everyone in

warring countries pray to the same God for victory?

John: Yes. It doesn't take a high percentage of such attitudes to start wars, but the vast majority of religious people are peaceful.

Mary: Remember he said "Even when religious people are peaceful, that doesn't mean God exists. But that *belief* makes them vulnerable to exploitation by despots who mask their intentions by appearing religious." He also said "You don't have to believe in God to be ethical."

John: We could argue ethics and religious abuses all day long. I don't deny they exist. But the issue with us is not religion. It's spirituality and the existence of God. Some days it seems there is an *abstract* God, omnipresent, but not personal –and that's okay. On other days, though, we want a personal God because we don't feel safe to think of "God, the Universe." That's just renaming things.

Mary: And for God to be personal, people often *think* of Him as God the Father (or Mother) and Christ the Savior. If God really is an omnipresent being, then we have to see Him in a *personal* way or we can't pray or meditate with feeling.

Harry: Hey Guys. Wha 'suuup?

John: Hi, Harry. We were talking about atheists.

Mary: How're you, Harry? Go on John.

John: You know, apparently *some* people *can* feel God in the abstract. Some have

had mystical experiences in which they *feel* something personal and powerful. Still they may *not* hear words or have visions of an angel. But when they *talk* about this higher perspective with other people, they may use words freely that generate the *feeling* they want to convey. Those words come from high feelings about family, hopes and dreams. From this we get our mental pictures of God, Heaven and angels.

Mary:        Maybe it's the use of metaphors and animated language that bothers some atheists. They think *everyone* that uses Bible imagery and expression is being literal about it.

John:        I think atheists confuse the language of feeling and spirit with the language of scientific and historical fact. Some might feel their parents force-fed them dogma. So they are out to destroy religion because of the guilt feelings it seemed to cause. So far this is about language and abuses of society. But there are problems with atheists that go way beyond this.

Harry:        Whoo-wee! Lay it on us, Bro; you're really rollin' now.

John:        Are you making fun, Harry? Well okay. To be an atheist, I understand you have to believe there is no God, there is no soul, there is no purpose in the universe, and when you die that's it. They base this on not being able to measure or prove these things scientifically. To me, that might be reason to be *agnostic*. But to be an *atheist* you have to have an *unbelievable* amount of faith! A negative kind.

Harry:        Oh yeah, man! That's as clear as...uh... what?

John:        One: You have to believe that because you haven't seen it, it can't exist. How

about the discovery of germs or radio waves? Once they couldn't be seen. Two: You have to believe that your soul is not real; that consciousness is an illusion or just a kind of physical field around gray matter.

Harry: And when your bod dies, that's all she wrote? Might as well be swallowed by a black hole in outer space.

John: Yes. But the very fact that you are you and not someone else proves there is more: Individual identity. There is something about each mind that's unique and goes way beyond what memories it has in it. Let's call this the "soul" or "inner mind." It doesn't end just because the body dies.

Harry: That's mighty heavy, Dude. That kind of talk could throw the earth off its axis.

Mary: Well, how would you put it, Harry?

Harry: Uh. Maybe I would ask an atheist "Mr. Atheist, where was your mind before you were born?" If he said "nowhere", I would say. "Well if it can pop up from nowhere once, why can't it do it again? What's your beef about thinking of it like something that just goes on and on?"

Mary: They might talk about memory being necessary for a mind.

Harry: Only necessary if you want to remember. I'm not sure I want to remember last Saturday night. I had a little bit too much to drink and I picked up this *Amazon* somewhere, and, and...

Mary: We get the idea Harry. We got it.

John: Memory is what the mind is *aware* of. Memory is not the *awareness* itself. It's not who you are. Your mind's core – the inner *you*- is the same even if your body changes, even if your memory changes.

Harry: I heard tell that all the cells and stuff in the body swaps out every few years. I'm not made of the same stuff anymore. But y'all, I'm still the same *me*.

Mary: Back in high school, I was taught that the *brain* records memory physically. And it does it by electrochemical action along -uh- neural pathways. But my *mind* doesn't get *any* of that. I get blue. I smell a flower. I feel warm. Our mind's perceptions don't look like what the scientists measure. They can't see what my mind sees.

John: That's right, but there's nothing *more* obvious to me than my mind's *existence*. So our individual mind has a place that no one but we can see.

Harry: Well then, those little electric squiggles and glow-spots in a brain scan: That's just for the *brain*, not the *mind*?

John: Basically, yes. But most everyone thinks of the brain as *part* of the mind, or something that works with it, anyway. Our inner mind is *affected by* the world but can never see anything as it *really* is. We don't see electric signals and brain chemicals.

Mary: I remember something from philosophy. Didn't someone – oh yes, Immanuel Kant called that "das Noumenon," the thing in itself.

John: I believe so. Anyway, the mind's core is more than simple effects in the *brain*. I think the atheist believes that there is nothing more, because that would admit that something in you might survive the body.

Harry: Oh, they can't have that. No way man.

Mary: Someday, maybe science can actually measure a soul.

Harry: Whoa! This is going way beyond heavy! I feel that black hole right now, opening up under my feet. Or... what my mind *thinks* are feet.

Mary: Oh, behave Harry... You know, a lot of this depends on what you know and the words you use. Not all *spiritual* people would see the Bible or evolution or even the big bang theory the same way. Maybe it's the same with people who call themselves atheists.

John: Well, you could be right there. Some might even have views that are similar to that of Christians, but they resist the baggage that we know as *religion*.

Harry: Yeah. Kind of like those Unitarian and Secular Humanist people. What *are* they anyhow?... Now some *Unity* people don't worry about telling what they are. They just say they're *truth seekers* and go back to their goodies and coffee.

John: (Chuckle) How do we deal with this clown, Mary? Anyway...I'm hopeful that honest searchers, whatever camp they are in, will find truth... eventually.

Narrator: This skit touches on the mind and its relation to the elusive concept of soul. That is a concept atheists may find abhorrent because it begs the questions of *why and*

*how* to a higher entity. The mind's core cannot be seen by another. The people in this skit bear no resemblance to your mind's perceptions of them. In fact, they bear no resemblance to their own mind's perceptions. If you truly wish to understand the message you have just witnessed, you will have to transcend who you think you are and enter a higher dimension.... Affordable tickets to a higher dimension will be available at a future time.

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