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ATHEISM IN THE UNIVERSAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY *

As a term, atheism (Greek: α —negation, denial, $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ —God) is a Latinized form of the Greek word $\alpha\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$, which arose at the turn of the 17th century and means:

1. A doctrine or a man’s existential attitude expressing a negation of the existence of God understood as a fully perfect and transcendent being who is independent of the world and man, who is necessary (unconditioned), the cause of all reality, the personal Absolute, with whom man can enter into conscious relations (religion).

2. A doctrine that recognizes the Absolute but as lacking in one or more attributes of God (pantheism, panentheism, deism).

3. A doctrine that holds that it is impossible to prove God’s existence or that His existence cannot be determined (agnosticism, skepticism).

Atheism is a complex phenomenon in which we may distinguish the following aspects:

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1. A *philosophical* aspect that means: (a) at the level of being—a negation of God’s existence or a deformation of the conception of God (metaphysical atheism); (b) at the level of knowledge—agnosticism (which holds that God is completely unknowable) or skepticism (which holds that the problem of God’s existence cannot be resolved—epistemological atheism); (c) at the level of language—the opinion that metaphysical theses concerning God are nonsensical (the contradiction of the concept of God—semiotic atheism); and (d) on the level of values—ascribing to man divine attributes (anthropological atheism).

2. A *religious* aspect—a personal severing of bonds with God, the lack of any influence of faith in God upon moral life (infidelity, irreligion, impiety).

3. A *psychological* aspect—the creation of vicarious forms of religiousness, so-called religions of escape.

4. A *sociological* aspect—the disappearance of religious practices, the laicization and secularization of life, indifferentism (indifference to matters of God and religion), anti-theism, post-atheism.

There are some particular forms of atheism, including:

1. *Anti-theism*—a theoretical negation of God associated with enmity toward religion in practice and with activities aimed at eliminating God and religion from the life of man and of human culture.

2. *Pseudo-atheism*—the conviction that one has negated God while in fact one unconsciously believes in God, because the one whose existence is denied is not God but something else.

3. *Post-atheism*—absolute ignorance (absence) in the theory and practice of the problem of God and religion.

Atheism is primarily a religious and cultural phenomenon in which an important role is played by a philosophical (cognitive-thought) element associated with an understanding of the Divine Being.

In all its forms (theoretical and practical), atheism is a secondary attitude compared with the thought about God (divinity) that appears in

man's mind as the result of personal knowledge or is received from the social-cultural milieu. The negation (rejection) of God cannot be a primordial position, for it implies at least a certain acquaintance with that which is negated.

As the history of human culture shows, no culture has ever existed without religion. The presence of religion in all cultures is testimony to man's ability to know spontaneously and naturally and to affirm some perfect being (God, divinity), the understanding of which (whom) takes a definite shape in a given religion and culture. Man's relation to the Transcendent forms the center of every culture.

The many representations and conceptions of divinity that have existed throughout history and have served as the foundation for the formation of various religions are conditioned by culture, and in light of this, the problem of atheism as the negation of divinity in the widest sense of this word has a religious-cultural frame of reference.

In the European cultural milieu, there was an encounter between Greek thought (which was rich both in religious experiences and in philosophical investigations concerning the Absolute) and Judeo-Christian Revelation (which presents God as the absolute Person). As a result, there was shaped (in the Christian religion) a philosophical and religious conception of God as the Absolute of Existence, the Most Perfect Being, the Absolute Person, the Fullness of Good, the free Creator of the world and man, and the reason for man's personal life—his knowledge, love and creativity. Thus understood, God is the object of philosophical investigations, the essential factor in religion and all Christian culture.

The non-Christian cultures associated with the great religions of the Far East (India, China) are non-theistic (a-theistic) from the point of view of Christian theism, but this cannot be interpreted to mean that they radically reject the Absolute and religion. In these religions, the understanding of the divinity most often has a pantheistic character.

Thus, we should distinguish atheism as irreligion, that is, as the negation of everything divine and the rejection of any claims to the truth of religious propositions, from atheism as non-theism, or the rejection of a particular theism (e.g., of monotheism).

The History of Atheism

The Ancient World and the Middle Ages

The world of Greek culture was saturated with the presence of the gods and religiousness. The “theological” poets, such as Homer and Hesiod, testify to this, as do the philosophers at a later period. The dominant form of religion was polytheism (apart from the Orphic religion). The gods personified the powers of nature or human characteristics. The life of individual Greeks and that of the Greek polis were dedicated to the gods. Even the emerging philosophical thought that investigated the ἀρχή of reality, and in this way arrived at a constantly more perfect understanding of the absolute, held that all things are full of gods (Thales). For the Greeks, nature and the universe (cosmos) as a whole manifested itself as divine.

In Greece, a mythological polytheistic religion encountered emerging philosophical conceptions of the absolute, which in the case of some of the most eminent representatives of Greek philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus), were close to the understanding of the absolute as God.

In Greek culture, atheists (i.e., those who negated the existence of the gods) were few and existed at the margins of social life. The oldest examples of the use of the term ἀθεότης occur among Greek poets in the 6th century BC (e.g., in Bacchylides, Pindar, Sophocles) to mean abandonment by the gods.

In the ancient Greek world, we may distinguish three forms of atheism:

1. The atheism of Greek polytheistic and political religion, in which the gods are the personified powers of nature or history.

2. Atheism as the result of an encounter between the mythological religion and philosophical reflection, where philosophers were accused of atheism. The philosophers criticized and undermined the existence of the gods as being burdened with imperfections, contrasting the gods with the Absolute whom they had come to know and recognize as the result of their philosophical investigations. Plato was the first to use the term atheism to mean the negation of the existence of the gods; atheism as this was sanctioned by the state.¹ The most eminent among ancient philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, and especially Socrates) were accused of atheism in this sense.²

3. Explicit atheism was associated, in Greece, with materialistic monism and with agnosticism and skepticism, which occurred as: (a) the materialistic monism of Democritus and Leucippus, a materialistic understanding of Nature in Epicurus and the Epicureans (who in fact did not deny the existence of the gods but held that the gods existed in the next world and were not interested in man—the seeds of deism); (b) a naturalistic trend in sophistry (the politician-sophists, e.g. Critias, who de-sacralized the concept of divinity and held that it was contrived by politicians in order to increase respect for the laws); (c) some cynics with materialistic views radically opposed the deities recognized by the state (e.g., according to Antisthenes, the existence of many gods is simply a declaration of “law,” since “by nature” God is one, cannot be compared to anything else, and cannot be known with the help of images); (d) the gods are merely deified heroes, kings or leaders (Euhemerus of Messina); (e) the epistemological atheism of Protagoras, who advanced arguments “for” and “against” God’s existence and took a skept-

¹ Cf. *Apologia Socratis*, 26 C 3.

² These philosophers did not proclaim atheism in a strict sense, but their views were rather close to theism.

tical position: “Concerning the gods, I have no means of knowing whether they exist or not or of what sort they may be. Many things prevent knowledge including the obscurity of the subject and the brevity of human life.”³

In Greece, there were known trials for impiety (ἀσέβεια) and blasphemy (ἀθεότης). Someone who denied the existence of the gods (an atheist) was regarded as an enemy of the state. The classic example of this attitude was the trial of Socrates and his condemnation to death for the crime of “atheism.”

Sparta and Rome were more tolerant than Athens; they were content with external expressions of devotion to the official gods, and did not interfere in personal convictions or discussions among philosophers. In ancient Rome, Lucretius (a continuator of Epicureanism and the author of *De rerum natura*) proclaimed atheistic views. He proposed materialism, naturalism and sensualism, and he saw the genesis of religion in an ignorance and fear of the powers of nature.

Christian thinkers of the first centuries AD, with the most eminent among them being St. Augustine, focused their investigations upon the problem of understanding God’s essence (who God is). They searched for the best ways to know Him and the most intelligible language with which to speak of Him. They drew upon the accomplishments of the most eminent philosophers, especially Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, and modified their views so that they would be in agreement with the revealed truth about God as Love, the Creator and man’s Redeemer.

Centuries of meditations by Christian thinkers led to an accumulation of reflections on God’s existence and nature, and His relation to the world and to man. The greatest achievement was the discovery of the ways of natural knowledge about God—independent of religion,

³ Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Zurich: Weidmann, 1985), 80 B 4. Cit. after William K. Ch. Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers: From Thales to Aristotle* (Harper & Row, 1975), 68.

and showing the bonds between the world and man (the theory of participation). By the development of a philosophy of being (metaphysics) that was independent of Revelation (although done in the context of Revelation), they developed the conception of the “God of the philosophers” who is identical (the same designate) with the “God of religion” (the God of Christian Revelation).

In Christian antiquity and in the Middle Ages, explicit and declared atheism does not occur. However, in the understanding of God’s essence (nature) and His relation to the world, certain tendencies appeared which deformed the conception of the Christian God (e.g., in antiquity, there were Gnostic and selective movements—heresies). In the Middle Ages, there were trends that had views departing from the accepted image of God, which distorted the concept of God or attacked the possibility of knowing God by reason; these were:

1. *Pantheistic* tendencies: John Scotus Eriugena (that God is beyond the world, as in Pseudo-Dionysius and Plotinus), Amalric (Amaury) of Bène, David of Dinant;

2. *Nominalistic-agnostic (anti-metaphysical)* tendencies initiated by William Ockham (14th century), who limited the range of human knowledge to singular objects and denied any possibility of knowing philosophical and theological truths (including truths concerning the existence of God). Ockham’s disciples, John of Mirecourt and Nicholas of Autricourt, attacked the principle of causality and substance, and proclaimed that God’s existence could not be known rationally. Nicholas de Cusa was influenced by neo-Platonism and held to a unique kind of agnosticism: God is beyond all categories and individual beings; our knowledge of Him, described as *docta ignorantia*, relies upon conjectures.

The nominalistic position of Ockham and other nominalists facilitated a divorce between faith and reason in the knowledge of God. The ideology of John Wycliffe, John Huss and Martin Luther came out of

this trend. Nominalism also paved the way for modern agnosticism and empiricism.

Modern Times

The Renaissance was a transition from the Middle Ages, in which metaphysical, religious and theological interests were dominant, to modern times. The Renaissance marked a turning away from metaphysical-religious problems toward man and nature, especially man's freedom in the various domains of life. The humanistic tendencies of this period were associated with a skeptical attitude toward explanations in ultimate terms, and with an empirical and practical attitude.

Modern skepticism was recognized as the proper method of a practically oriented philosophy that was understood as the art of living (Michel de Montaigne, Pierre Charron, Francisco Sanches, Pierre Bayle).

Montaigne held that the problem of the existence of God and the soul cannot be resolved; that it is a waste to spend one's life on such problems which, as is known beforehand, cannot be resolved; thus it is better to abstain from considering them. Montaigne connected his skepticism with naturalism and rationalism; his humanism was naturalistic—he regarded man as a part of nature. Despite skeptical tendencies, he held that the human reason is the measure of truth.

Charron, like Montaigne, regarded skepticism as the only correct cognitive position for man. He held that religion was a merely human construct and thereby denied the reality of God's existence.

The methodological tendencies of the Renaissance, especially empiricism, were clearly manifested in the philosophy of Francis Bacon. Bacon presented a new attitude in which science was treated no longer as a way to know the truth about reality but as a means for achieving practical ends. With this statement, he exchanged the criterion of truth for the criterion of efficiency and progress. Science should

serve man's domination over nature. The program of empirical science formulated by Bacon excluded from the field of scientific knowledge the truths of the faith, including the truth about God, which—according to him—lies outside the reach of philosophy (agnosticism, an anti-metaphysical attitude).

Herbert of Cherbury represented rationalism joined with naturalism. He was the author of a conception of natural religion and a natural system of culture. According to his conception, all the domains of culture should be regulated in accordance with the principles of natural reason. His conception of natural religion, a purely rational religion beyond particular confessions, was based on his conviction that the reason is the single source of truth. The truths of natural religion are innate, which means they were grafted upon man by nature, and nature is infallible. Thus, religious truths are infallible. While Herbert accepted the existence of the Supreme Being, this was a deistic interpretation.

René Descartes brought about a radical change in the way philosophy was done, and he is rightly regarded as the creator of modern philosophy. He made the self-knowledge of the thinking "I," the thinking substance (*res cogitans*) which is man, into the starting point of philosophy. It is thought (*cogito*), and not knowledge understood as man's contact with existing extra-subjective reality, which became the source of truth and certainty in knowledge. In this way, there was a break with the hitherto prevalent paradigm of the philosophy of being, which connected the affirmation of God's existence with the knowledge of the really existing extra-subjective world, with metaphysical knowledge which searched for the ontic reason that would explain in ultimate terms the existence of non-necessary, changing beings. Descartes started a new direction in philosophical reflection in which thought dominated knowledge, the idea dominated really existing being, and the human subject became the source and creator of truth. In this philosophy of the subject, the idea of God as the idea of an infinite

being was innate in human consciousness. This connection of the problem of God with consciousness (thought), rather than with knowledge, was inherited by the majority of modern and contemporary thinkers.

Descartes did not deny God's existence. He assigned an important place to the idea of God in his philosophy (as the guarantee of the truth and the source of certainty of knowledge). But by connecting the problem of God with human consciousness, reducing the idea of God to a philosophical principle, reducing the function of God to being the creator and preserver of a world understood in mechanistic terms, and making a radical division between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, his philosophy became the source of various positions on the problem of God: pantheism (as the identification of God with the world; e.g., Baruch Spinoza), German idealism, deism (the idea that God created the world but has no connections with it), and atheism (both materialistic and existential atheism).

The principle of immanence established by Descartes also became the source of various positions with respect to knowledge: radical rationalism, agnosticism, skepticism, sensualism, empiricism, positivism and scientism. All these positions contributed, at least indirectly, to a distortion of the idea of God and the elimination of this problem from the field of rational knowledge, which often led to a rejection of God's existence, especially to practical atheism.

Spinoza developed the inspirations of Descartes in a monistic spirit. He rethought Descartes's method in a logical and, in his opinion, consistent manner and as a result developed a theory of God as the reality of all things. According to Spinoza, only one substance exists—the Infinite and Divine Substance which is identical with nature (*Deus sive natura*). Extension and thought are two among the many attributes of the Infinite Substance. Man exists and is in God, and nothing can either exist or be understood without God. Finite minds are modifications that belong to the attribute of thinking, and finite bodies are modifications

belonging to the attribute of extension. God is the absolute essence. Particular things follow in infinite numbers and in infinite ways from the eternal necessity of God's nature: "Every idea of every body, or of every particular thing actually existing, necessarily involves the eternal and infinite essence of God."⁴

Spinoza's pantheistic monism paved the way for new forms of monism as an ontological structure that reduced all reality to one principle or form of being (materialistic monism, idealistic monism). These new forms of monism either involved a rejection of God (materialism) or a distortion of His image (idealistic pantheism). Spinoza's philosophy as a naturalistic interpretation of the world (an explanation that did not call upon efficient and final causes) led indirectly to the treatment of nature as an autonomous system that can be scientifically investigated; it was the proclamation of a fully scientific view of the world in which there was no place for the problem of God (the horizons of knowledge are closed to God).

In the 17th century, Thomas Hobbes was an advocate for the renewal of the ancient naturalism of the Stoics and Epicureans. As a materialist (he recognized only the existence of matter), he accepted a mechanistic vision of the world. According to him, spiritual objects—God and the soul—are fictions. Also, the process of knowledge has a mechanistic nature, and man is governed by the same mechanical laws as is nature. Hobbes, a resolute atheist and opponent of religion, was the creator of "ethical sociologism"—the theory that makes moral judgments and norms dependent upon the decisions of individuals (relativism).

The naturalistic, rationalistic and empirical tendencies of the Renaissance became a theoretical foundation for the thought of the Enlightenment in which there was a sharp critique of religion, especially

⁴ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York 1951), pt. II, prop. 45.

Christianity. The philosophers of the Enlightenment set before themselves primarily practical and cultural aims; they recognized the human reason as the only source of truth and wanted to cleanse philosophy and culture of “prejudices,” which they understood as faith in a supernatural reality.

The tendencies of the Enlightenment appeared first in England, where they were first prepared by the views of Francis Bacon and John Locke, and then most clearly expressed in David Hume. As a deist, Locke recognized a rationalistic and philosophical religion, that is, a religion in accordance with reason. Unlike Herbert, Locke recognized that ideas that agree with reason do not need to be innate, but can be acquired by experience (empiricism). Hume criticized the principles of causality and substance, which inevitably led to the questioning of metaphysics and a critique of the rational proofs for the existence of God. He held that the problem of God and religion belongs to the domain of faith, not knowledge. No rational theory of God is possible. With his idea that religion is a necessary construct of the human psyche, he initiated the psychological and historical study of religion.

The French Enlightenment was inspired by the thought of Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle and Pierre Bayle, and then developed by Voltaire, whose ideas were continued by the encyclopedists. Fontenelle held a naturalistic-mechanistic image of the world; the first organizer of the world was God understood in mechanistic terms. He was skeptical of tradition, whether ancient or Christian, and he undertook one of the first attempts in the Enlightenment at a critique of religion (a rationalistic and naturalistic critique of religion). Bayle, who preceded Voltaire and the encyclopedists, is regarded as the first apologist for atheism in the West. He stated that the concept of God contained a contradiction, for immutability and freedom cannot be reconciled with each other. Thus, revealed religious truths are in contradiction to the data of reason.

He also advanced the postulate that ethics be independent of metaphysics and religion.

Voltaire, the most typical representative of deism, held that God created the world but has no interest in the world. He held to a radical rationalism according to which reason demands the rejection of all sources of truth apart from reason. He was both a philosopher and a popular writer with the practical aim of doing battle with backwardness and prejudice. As a naturalist, he held that only the natural world exists (there are no supernatural phenomena). He had a radical anti-metaphysical and anti-religious (anti-Christian) attitude.

Voltaire's tendencies were carried on by the encyclopedists, who were Voltaire's collaborators on the *Great Encyclopedia* published by Denis Diderot. Diderot's own views regarding the problem of God underwent an evolution. At the beginning he was a theist, then he accepted deism, and finally he rejected the existence of God and embraced atheism as he adopted a materialistic conception of reality and a sensualist conception of knowledge (sense experience is the only source of knowledge). At the end, he held that religion is a construct of society.

The naturalistic and materialistic tendencies characteristic of the Enlightenment found expression in materialistic systems that were essentially atheistic. The chief follower of materialism in France, Julien Offray de La Mettrie, was inspired by a mechanistic understanding of nature. He held that everything that exists is material, including man. The soul is dependent upon the body and must be a body. Everything, including man, operates by virtue of a mechanistically constructed system. The consequence of this materialistic monism was the negation of God and the immortal soul.

Helvetius, like La Mettrie, accepted materialism, sensualism and a naturalistic conception of man. He was clearly opposed to metaphysics and religion, and in his critique of religion he professed atheism. Jean Meslier rejected any transcendent causes of the world and thought

that man had originated in matter; he criticized Christianity and, in keeping with his materialistic monism, he denied the existence of God.

In Germany in the 19th century, Jacob Molechot, Karl Vogt and Ludwig Büchner proclaimed an atheistic mechanistic materialism which reduced all reality to matter as it develops mechanistically. In the biological sciences, Ernst Haeckel propagated this trend.

Kant, although he was a religious man, by his theory of knowledge, his new conception of science, his radical agnosticism and his elimination of metaphysics from the field of scientific knowledge, played an important role in the devaluation of the problem of God. He gave a new form to the principle of the immanence of knowledge that had been introduced by Descartes. In Kant's philosophy, radically rationalistic (*a priori*) tendencies, directly inspired by Wolff, came together with empirical tendencies, especially those of Hume. Kant tried to make a synthesis of the two. This became possible by bringing about a revolution in the theory of knowledge in which the subject, who is endowed with an *a priori* structure, imposes this structure upon the object, and the object of knowledge is the result of impressions provided by sensibly knowable things and subjective *a priori* categories. Kant created a new conception of science in which *a priori* factors played the leading role. The reason imposes its own structures upon reality and cannot transcend the range of sense experience. Therefore, only mathematics and pure natural science can be recognized as science. There is no place for metaphysics among the sciences. Things in themselves—including God, the world and the human soul—are unknowable (agnosticism). The world, God, and the soul are *a priori* ideas of the theoretical reason, and their existence cannot be resolved within the framework of rational knowledge.

Kant thought that by criticizing the metaphysical proofs for the existence of God and rejecting metaphysics he was making room for faith. He associated the problem of God's existence with the practical

reason, which was guided by the postulates of the will and action. In this view, it is not the reason but the will which is decisive in the affirmation or denial of God. Ultimately, whether one accepts God's existence is an option without rational grounds.

This new way of understanding God (the absolute) was inherited by the representatives of German idealism: Johann G. Fichte, Friedrich W. J. Schelling and Georg W. F. Hegel. The philosophy of Fichte holds the priority of ideas over reality, of act over substance, of the subject over the object, of the self over the external world, of freedom over necessity, and of the will over reason; it was a unique synthesis of Spinozism and Kantianism.

Fichte accepted an absolute, pure, non-substantial and unconscious self to which he ascribed absoluteness. The "absolute I" has a theoretical-practical character. Reality has the same nature as thought and the self. The products of the self separate from it and stand opposite to it as object to subject. The object and the subject have the same source—they come from the self. Thought and being are identical. The "absolute I" is unlimited activity that aspires to an awareness of its own freedom. Consciousness exists only in the form of individual consciousness. The "absolute I" is thus expressed in the community of finite subjects, of finite selves, each of whom aspires to achieve true freedom. In Fichte's philosophy, the absolute has an immanent character, both with respect to the world of nature and with respect to human selves, and it has an evolutionary character. Thus, this is an idealistic pantheism in which there is no place for an absolute and transcendent personal God.

Like Fichte, Schelling accepted an absolute which transcended the self and matter, from which all reality came forth. The absolute is the identity of real and ideal being, of nature and spirit. Nature and the self are only secondary forms of being. They come from the absolute (pure consciousness). The absolute has an evolutionary character. It is a

process that transcends the opposition of self and nature. While in the second phase of his creative work, Schelling emphasized the personal nature of God and the freedom of His creative act, even after transforming the impersonal metaphysical absolute of idealism into the personal God that is revealed to religious consciousnesses, he remained more a pantheist than a theist.

Hegel was the most influential thinker in the movement of idealistic pantheism. He considered Spinoza's conception of the Absolute to be inadequate with respect to its designate. God, according to Hegel, should be conceived as Spirit. In Hegel's philosophy, the Absolute is the whole of reality, but this was understood differently than in Spinoza. According to Hegel, all reality can be reduced to the point where truth is apprehended and expressed not only as substance, but also as subject. In Hegel's philosophy, the Absolute-God is the Spirit, the "absolute idea," the "absolute concept." It is the "thought that thinks itself" or the "self-thinking thought." It is a spirit and a self-illuminating subject (substance-everything). The Absolute is the whole of reality, and wholeness is a process of self-reflection: reality arrives at a knowledge of itself in and through the human spirit. Nature is a necessary introductory condition for human consciousness (that which is objective). Nature and human consciousness are moments in the life of the Absolute. In nature, the Absolute passes into objectivity or expresses itself in it. In the human sphere of consciousness, the Absolute returns to itself, which means it returns as a spirit. It is the world's knowing of itself. Nature and the sphere of the human spirit are the region in which the eternal idea (or eternal essence) manifests itself. Human knowledge concerning the Absolute and the Absolute's knowledge are the same. Hegel does not identify God with man. God is the whole, but man is not. However, the whole comes to true knowledge about itself in and through man's spirit. This happens at different levels: (a) at the level of imaginative thought—in religious consciousness; (b) at the level of

conceptual knowledge—in science; (c) at the level of the philosophy of history, the ideal term of which is the full truth about reality as it occurs in the form of the Absolute's knowledge of itself.

Hegel reduced God to the Absolute, to a logical process and a subjective concept of the absolute idea that developed in three stages: thesis—antithesis—synthesis. Thus, Hegel identified divinity with the whole, with the totality of existence, life and truth. This was a peculiar transformation of the Infinite into the finite and of the finite into the Infinite. God without the world and without man would not be God. Although Hegel did not deny the existence of God, his conception of the evolving and open Absolute was a starting point for various interpretations. All forms of contemporary atheism in greater or lesser degree make appeal to the Hegelian conception of the Absolute.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the negation of the existence of God and the negative evaluation of religion became more intense and radical. This had many causes:

1. The connection of the idea of God with human consciousness rather than with the extra-subjective world, as this was initiated by Descartes and grounded by Kant, and Hegel's making of human consciousness into the place where the Absolute becomes aware of itself—this ultimately bore fruit in the idea that human consciousness creates God and religion.

2. Epistemological immanentism and ontological immanentism, idealistic and materialistic forms of monism that negated God's transcendence and made of Him an idea that is immanent in relation to consciousness, or a being within the world of nature and history.

3. Agnosticism and rationalism (the rejection of all sources of knowledge except the purely rational) excluded everything which is transcendent and supernatural.

4. The imperialism of the positivist conception of science, which regarded metaphysics and theology as non-scientific (and thus of no

value) and therefore held that these fields should be replaced by science, and which regarded as non-scientific any reference to God as the cause of the physical world.

The immediate horizon of thought that the authors of the negation of God looked to was Hegel's transcendental idealism, which regarded fundamental Christian dogmas as moments in which human transcendent subjectivity was actualized within the world and within history.

The connection of Ludwig Feuerbach's and Karl Marx's theories with Hegelianism is obvious. The Hegelian Absolute Spirit was replaced in these theories by man. Existence *per se* (a prerogative of God) was ascribed to man. Man's choice became an absolute which took God's place (the deification of man). Man became autonomous and was saved by right action.

Most importantly, the Hegelian conception of the Absolute became the starting point for the process of the anthropomorphization of God and the deification of man, which inevitably led to the rejection of God and the rise of anthropological atheism (man in the place of God), which was called positive or humanistic atheism.

The representatives of the Hegelian left played a significant role in this process: Bruno Bauer, David F. Strauss, and most importantly Feuerbach. They all had a negative attitude toward religion, especially toward Christianity. Bauer was inspired by certain ideas of Hegel's philosophy and produced a naturalistic interpretation of Holy Scripture. He regarded Christianity as a phase of Hellenism. According to Strauss, Christ is only a personification of the idea of humanity, and God is only the name of infinity.

Feuerbach was the most extreme in his views, drawing out radical consequences from the philosophies of Kant, Fichte and Hegel, in which the human subject had almost divine attributes. However, Feuerbach held to different philosophical presuppositions than those of He-

gel—nominalism (concepts as constructs of the mind), naturalism and materialism (everything is matter or a manifestation of matter). These presuppositions made it easier for Feuerbach to state that God and religion are a construct of man, that only man can be a god for man. The rejection of God thus became a condition for man's development and full affirmation. Man's religious consciousness is a falsified consciousness. God does not exist apart from human consciousness. He is simply a construct of human desires and frustration that want to achieve in something illusory that which cannot be realized in real human life. The idea of God is thus nothing more than a projection of human consciousness, the hypostatized idea of the human species.

Religion is the disuniting of man from himself; he sets God before him as the antithesis of himself. God is not what man is—man is not what God is. God is the infinite, man the finite being; God is perfect, man imperfect; God eternal, man temporal; God almighty, man weak; God holy, man sinful. God and man are extremes: God is the absolutely positive, the sum of all realities; man the absolutely negative, comprehending all negations.⁵

When he accepts God, man reduces himself to the rank of a miserable and sinful creature. The religious man recognizes all the values of the human race not in man, but in God, and thus cancels himself out. In this conception, God and religion have a negative function. They act as a brake upon morality and all human culture. They are the cause of the dehumanization of man. The rejection of religious transcendence restores to man his true being—his species being. When he eliminates God, man becomes the ultimate end for himself: *Homo homini Deus est*—then the highest and first law becomes the love of man for man.⁶

⁵ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. Marian Evans (London: John Chapman, 1854), 32.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 268.

Man is a social being. Therefore, man's fulfillment requires a social environment. Society, or more strictly the state, is the proper perspective standing before man. Society or the state is the unity of men and the objective expression of the awareness of this unity. According to Feuerbach,

In the State the powers of man divide and develop only to constitute an infinite being through this division and through their reunion; many human beings, many powers are one power. The State is the essence of all realities, the State is the providence of man. . . . The true State is the unlimited, infinite, true, complete, divine Man . . . the absolute Man.⁷

Feuerbach draws a startling conclusion: "politics must become our religion."⁸ The negation of God (atheism) is the condition for the "new religion." The state can become absolute only when God is replaced by man, and theology by anthropology.

With regard to the understanding of God and religion, Marx assumed Feuerbach's main thesis: God and religion are a construct of man. In Marx's philosophy, the rejection of God and religion is a necessary condition for giving value to man. Marx introduced new elements to the interpretation of religion. He pointed to economic and social factors as playing a fundamental role in the creation of culture and religion. According to Marx, religion is a form of the alienation of man. Man creates the idea of God and religious reality in a disadvantageous economic-social situation which evokes the need for an ideal world. Religious alienation is thus a secondary form of alienation compared with the economic-social alienation that is caused by the unjust social relations that predominate in capitalism.

⁷ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II, ed. Friedrich Jodl and Wilhelm Bolin (Stuttgart: Frommann Verlag, 1959), 220. Cit. after Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. VII (New York: DOUBLEDAY, 1994), 299.

⁸ Feuerbach, *Sämtliche Werke*, 219. Cit. after Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. VII, 299.

The foundation of irreligious criticism this: man makes religion; religion does not make man. Religion is, in fact, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet gained himself or has lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state, this society produce religion, which is an inverted world-consciousness, because they are an inverted world. Religion . . . is the fantastic realization of the human being because the human being has attained no true reality. Thus, the struggle against religion is indirectly the struggle against that world of which religion is the spiritual aroma.⁹

Religion is thus an “idealist delusion.” It is a deformation in the sphere of ideology, the awareness of man’s own insufficiency, his incompleteness and his completion by a “non-real” reality, and as such it has a negative influence upon human action or human praxis.

According to classical Marxism, religion has a twofold action: (a) it fortifies, which consists in maintaining (sanctifying) the prevailing unjust social order (for it is associated with the class of owners); (b) it puts to sleep (“Religion . . . is the opium of the people”¹⁰) and paralyzes the oppressed class (the proletariat). It deforms human needs and thereby contributes to the prolongation of the dependencies from which religious consciousness was a form of escape (it organizes an escape into an “imaginary” world). Religion thus performs a function of justification and consolation, and thereby it puts the reason to sleep and lessens the feeling of responsibility, shifting it into responsibility before God rather than before society. It diminishes man’s creative attitude toward his milieu and leads to a limitation of the historical process of the transformation of nature and the creation of the human social environment. It makes man passive and maintains him in illusion and slav-

⁹ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’*, trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O’Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 131.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

ery, and in this way it makes it difficult for man to pull himself out of his tragic situation. In a word, religion hinders revolution.

The result of such views on the genesis and character of religion was the strong demand that religion be eliminated from social and individual life and from human culture. Everything that stands in the way of transformations of the intended revolutionary act is evil and should be liquidated. Since religion was recognized as being associated with the bourgeoisie, it is an obstacle in the proletarian revolution. Thus, God must be “killed” and religion must be destroyed in order that society (the proletariat) not be hindered in the transformation of economic-social structures. The front of the struggle with religion was advanced by the means and methods most suited to place and circumstances. The struggle extended beyond the social manifestations of religion and Churches to the very depth of man: “[I]t was no longer a question of the layman’s struggle against the priest outside of him, but of his struggle against his own inner priest, his priestly nature.”¹¹

Atheism and the struggle against religion in Marxism ultimately has the character of a decision. It is not the result of investigations or reasoned conclusions. The justifications provided (materialism) are secondary to the *a priori* acceptance of atheism. The element of decision in Marxist and communist atheism is well expressed in the Communist Manifesto: “Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality.”¹² The struggle with religion became the aim of communist regimes that closed the entire transcendental horizon to man.

Engels, in principle, accepted and professed Marx’s theses on God and religion. He also emphasized the political conditions for religion: the ruling class accepts and uses religion, while the progressive

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹² Cit. after Philip J. Kain, *Marx and Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 117.

class accepts a revolutionary religion. Engels, like Marx, was convinced that religion itself will disappear and die a natural death when its base is removed. Science is the greatest ally in the struggle against religion, according to Engels, hence the need to propagate a scientific view of the world.

Lenin accepted the views of Marx and Engels on religion. He emphasized the restraining function of religion on revolutionary activity (“the opium of the people”). Religion is a non-scientific view of the world and an illusory reality. It is a harmful phenomenon and it puts the will to “sleep.” It is a hindrance in social actions. This was the basic reason why Lenin described religion as an enemy that must be fought, and he demanded an active struggle against religion.

A new link in the philosophical and cultural process of man’s being put in the place of God is the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. He referred to certain ideas of Hegel and German historicism and relied on sensualism and relativism. He thought that in our culture (Christian culture), the time had come to resign from God and the Christian religion and to ascribe divine attributes to man. This required a radical transvaluation of all previously recognized values, especially values associated with the relation between God and man. Nietzsche entered history as the one who pronounced the impressive words: “God hath died: now do *we* desire—the Superman to live.”¹³

Nietzsche was regarded as a prophet called to bring about a cultural and moral revolution. The essential goal was to dethrone God and establish man in His place.

According to Nietzsche, God existed for centuries in human consciousness as a myth. God is a construct of man that contains the projections of human desires and lower needs, especially the need to have

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (Logos Publishing, 2017), 167.

a lord. God is thus treated by Nietzsche as someone who lords over man and prevents him from achieving full maturity and autonomy. According to Nietzsche, this myth is beginning to vanish from human consciousness. It is a good occasion to eliminate God from man's life and to transvaluate values so that the development of the life of the more powerful not be hindered by the weak. The cult of God, and the cult of transcendent values that have been externally imposed upon man in the form of a codified morality that distinguishes good and evil, demean and enslave man. Nietzsche wanted to rise above good and evil and above the order of the false values that had been imposed upon man from above by some non-existent God. Only when freed from this myth, man will freely and maturely be able to establish his own values and thus become himself, a full man, a superman.

According to Nietzsche, what has died is the God of traditional Christian morality, which he called the morality of slaves. To blaspheme against the God who has died is no sin. It is a sin to blaspheme against the earth and to assign it a lesser value than religion and God. It is a sin to honor man less than God. Nietzsche writes: "I conjure you, my brethren, *remain true to the earth*, and believe not those who speak unto you of superearthy hopes!"¹⁴

After the death of God as the source of morality, man is obliged to make a great effort to create the superman. The will to power is necessary for this: "If we do not make a great renunciation and a lasting victory over ourselves out of the death of God, then we must bear the loss."¹⁵ Together with the new god who will be the superman, Nietzsche preserved religion, which is the cosmic "ladder" of power.

Atheism in the name of man, especially in the name of his freedom, took a clear and sharp form in the trends of existentialism repre-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵ Cit. after Liliana Frey-Rohn, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Psychological Approach to His Life and Work* (Zürich: Daimon Verlag, 1988), 87.

sented by Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Sartre expressed the most radical form of atheism in his attitude of life and his philosophy. He drew out the ultimate consequences of consciousness as the starting point of philosophy and of man as *res cogitans*. According to Sartre, man is a pure and creative consciousness. He identifies this consciousness with man's freedom. Human consciousness constitutes the meaning of all things and it creates the essence of man by his free and unconditioned decisions. Man does not possess a stable nature that could define and determine the direction of his action. Sartre replaced nature with history. Man creates himself in time (he has a history), and he gives an essence to his existence; existence precedes essence. All of man's assessments and choices are dictated only by factors within consciousness.

When he adopts the conception of man as absolute freedom, Sartre has to make a choice between man (his freedom) and God, who in order to be man's Creator, objectifies man. Sartre denies the existence of God in the name of his conception of man: God must be rejected in order to save man's freedom, which cannot admit any conditions. He who chooses man must eliminate everything that is opposed to his self-realization. God and man are competing realities. This makes it necessary for man to choose: either God or himself. In religion, Sartre sees only a negative aspect. Religion alienates man psychologically and neglects his human obligations. Sartre always arrives at the same conclusion: one must be a man among other men and so one must firmly reject God. The rejection and denial of God has the character of a fundamental decision and of an option for man, yet Sartre tries to provide a philosophical justification for his decision. He creates an ontology and within it he develops two kinds of argumentation.

The first is built on the Sartrean understanding of absolute freedom: if man was created by God, he would not possess freedom, for if God created man, He would have to follow a plan (model) of humanity;

then man would have a definite nature which would put a limit to his possibilities and his possible actions; man would be reduced to the role of a slave who acts out the impulses that God has grafted onto him. However, if man is to be truly free, he must possess absolute freedom which would enable him to create himself and his own essence. Man is dependent only upon himself, and this decides his fate. He is an autonomous subject and is absolutely free. Since man is absolutely free, God's existence must be excluded.

In his second argument, Sartre tries to show the contradiction in the very idea of God. He relies upon an ontology that categorizes the beings that are in the world. He distinguishes "being-in-itself," which is a thing that is always full of itself (identical) and has a definite nature, and "being-for-itself," which is a conscious being that by its own consciousness knows both that he exists and that other beings exist apart from it. In this ontology, what sort of being could God be? It is impossible for God to be a synthesis of "being-in-itself" and "being-for-itself," because these are mutually exclusive. God could be either a "being-in-itself," but then He would realize "massivity" or fullness like things and would be deprived of consciousness and freedom, or "being-for-itself," but then, while conscious and free, He would not be absolute, because He would be filled with nothingness. Sartre concludes that the idea of God is internally contradictory, and thus God does not exist.

Sartre's arguments presuppose a conception of God and a conception of human freedom that are not in accord with reality. For Sartre, God is not a transcendent being but an absolutized man. God as the Creator of the world of nature (determined beings) would not be a problem for Sartre. When He created will and freedom, God created the possibility of rebellion against Himself. The essence of Sartre's position is precisely rebellion—*non serviam* that results from succumbing

to the temptation: “you will be like gods”¹⁶—and the desire to be independent in the area of truth and the good, to be absolutely free and not conditioned by a creator.

Camus analyzed the human lot and concluded that life is absurd. The absurdity of existence affects all people and evokes the need for an inter-human solidarity that would help to overcome a burdensome and meaningless life. Solidarity with others excludes the affirmation of God. God is separate from men because he is jealous of man’s love. Consequently, Camus drew a conclusion—which is clearly in opposition to Christianity—that men may be loved only in opposition to God.

Merleau-Ponty regarded man as a “project” of the world who must be understood by establishing connections with this world. The world is man’s horizon, thus man’s destiny should not be associated with God. Like Sartre, Merleau-Ponty thought that the acceptance of God would destroy human freedom, that God’s perfection or absolute-ness would leave no room for man’s free activity: if God exists, there is no man. The contradictory character of the concept of God and the presence of evil in the world testify, according to Merleau-Ponty, to the impossibility of God’s existence.

Sigmund Freud, the creator of psychoanalysis, approached the problems of God and religion in a spirit of radical atheism. Although Freud described himself as an atheist at the beginning of his scientific career, religion was one of his chief interests. As an adherent of scientism, he thought that science and technology can resolve all human problems. He also tried to explain religion scientifically without reference to any supernatural factors. Freud, like Feuerbach, thought that the idea of God is a product of man, his fears and desires, and that God is nothing other than the concept of an “idealized” father. He went further

¹⁶ Gen. 3:5.

than Feuerbach in his explanation of religion by claiming that the sub-consciousness was the source of religion.

Freud drew an analogy between neurosis and religion, saying that they have a common origin. Neurosis is rooted in the individual psyche, while religion is rooted in the collective psyche that was formed at the beginning of humankind (the childhood stage of mankind). Religion is a collective neurosis associated with a universal Oedipus complex. Religion is a way of fighting the feeling of guilt and dread, and God is an “idealized” father.

In this view, religion is formed of psychic experiences that have been projected upon the external world. These experiences receive their shape in culture (the “super-ego”). Religious conduct is a socially institutionalized repetition of the relation of son and father. The religious reality is an illusion. Religion, like neurosis, is the result of a certain compromise, the investment of psychic energy into socially accepted domains such as literature and art (culture).

There is a certain ambiguity in Freud’s evaluation of the function of religion: religion provides a certain consolation and compensates man for the burden of life. Religion demands acts of renunciation and dedication. Yet religion is an illusory consolation. Religion urges man to search for an honest answer to the human drama of guilt, suffering and death.

Freud saw the significance of the great religions, especially the monotheistic religions, as leading mankind to form higher forms of morality and spiritual culture. He emphasized the role of religion in the Jewish nation and recognized the great figures of Judaism and Christianity (Moses, St. Paul and St. Francis of Assisi). This did not alter his decidedly negative opinion of religion. Religion is a delusion, which means that it provides the hope of realizing certain desires such as the need to possess a father, the existence of providence, and immortality. This is a false hope and it operates like a narcotic. While by accepting

the universal neurosis of religion, a man can avoid personal neurosis, religion does not allow man to be fully mature and autonomous. Religion does not, and cannot, become the road to man's happiness. Only modern science can fully eliminate and replace religion. The man of the scientific era can break away from the illusory God the Father. He can become "mature" and dominate the world by science and technology. According to Freud, it is an illusion to think that what science and technology cannot provide can be obtained anywhere else. Death must be accepted as an irrevocable fate and we must reconcile ourselves to it.

The conception of God and religion formulated by Freud is based on a naturalistic (controversial) conception of man according to which man is the seat of various drives, among which the sexual drive (a one-dimensional unconsciousness) dominates. The impossibility to fulfill these unconscious drives, especially the sexual drive, leads to universal sexual frustration. Other psychoanalysts criticized Freud's interpretation of man's basic needs and pointed to other needs and aims (e.g., Erich Fromm, who saw the need for social bonds as the basic drive, and Viktor Frankl, who saw the need for meaning).

This allegedly scientific explanation of the sources of religion is in fact based upon an absolutely unverifiable fantasy. The myth of the omnipotence of science and technology does not make Freud's theory any stronger. This myth has not been verified. Freud himself was outside of his scientific competence when he advanced the metaphysical thesis that God is an exclusively psychological reality.

The positivism of the 19th and 20th centuries had an indirect influence on the problem of God and religion. The influence of positivism occurred in two ways:

1. Auguste Comte advanced the theory of the three stages of human thought. After the religious-theological stage which appealed to religious elements to explain reality, and after the philosophical stage in which the world was explained by reasons that were transcendent in

relation to experience, there came the positive period—the time of the particular sciences correlated with practice (technology).

2. A new conception of science was created, and according to Comte, the chief scientific questions are about how the things and phenomena given in sense experience are and function (empiricism, sensualism), and how they can be interpreted by applying a mathematical method. Scientific knowledge grasps the quantitative and measurable aspect of reality, and thus refers primarily to the material world. By eliminating such questions as: On what account? Why? For what purpose?, science excludes metaphysics and theology from the range of rational knowledge and makes our perspectives of knowledge horizontal. This took place mainly in radical forms of positivism, especially in scientism which proclaimed an epistemological monism and would not accept anything that could not be scientifically proven or proven by the methods of mathematical physics.

Strictly speaking, neither positivism nor even scientism necessarily lead to the negation of God. By their method, the particular sciences do not have the necessary competence to present and resolve metaphysical problems, such as the problem of the existence of God, the beginning of the world, or the meaning of human life. Science should be neutral concerning the existence or non-existence of God, for there are no scientific arguments either for or against God's existence.

The actual position of individual men of science is another matter. Some recognize that science is not sufficient for resolving the essential problems of life; they allow for other types of knowledge (e.g., philosophy), and they state that science and religion neither contradict nor exclude each other. Others, who are most often inspired by certain philosophical options, hold that God does not exist or that the problem of God's existence belongs to the domain of myth and not to rational knowledge.

The actual domination of scientific knowledge and the associated horizontalization of human knowledge or thought, the practical orientation of applied science, and the successes of science and technology may contribute to a certain mentality or way of thinking where people conclude that, by science and technology, all problems can be solved and that we have mastered the world. The scientific-technological mentality can contribute to a loss of interest in matters that are not connected with the present life and its organization on earth, and to an indifference or even contempt for everything that is beyond the scope of applied science. In this way, it is not science directly, but the scientific-technological mentality that can become a reason for practical atheism.

The problem of the negation of God explicitly occurs in trends that have developed out of positivism and scientism: neo-positivism, analytical philosophy, structuralism, and naturalism.

Neo-positivism and analytical philosophy are associated with epistemological nominalism and radical empiricism, and they encompass important domains of life. This also finds expression in a variety of solutions with respect to the affirmation and negation of God. In its first period of development, neo-positivism was strongly opposed to classical rationalism and metaphysics. Its representatives rejected the existence of God. One of the creators of neo-positivism, Bertrand Russell, made an explicit declaration of atheism and was known for his attacks against the Christian religion and theology. He was a zealous apostle of radical rationalism and non-religious humanism.

In the first period of his work, Ludwig Wittgenstein eliminated statements about God and all metaphysical statements from the level of rational language. He transferred them to what he described as “mystical” terrain. Alfred J. Ayer presented an explicitly atheistic position. He regarded religious statements as meaningless because they are not empirically verifiable (the dogma of logical positivism). His well-known attack upon metaphysics and theology arose from his conviction that

the entire body of facts lies within the world as it can be known by the empirical sciences (empirical scientism). John N. Findlay, John J. Smart and others are known for their attempts to show that the concept of God as necessary being is logically contradictory.

Structuralism is represented especially by Claude Lévi-Strauss. It applies the structuralist method to the analysis of religious language and holds that religious language is chiefly a construct of man's sub-consciousness and has no real and transcendent meaning. Not only has God died, even His name should no longer occur within the horizon of knowledge because it has no meaning.

Naturalism developed especially in the USA. It regards nature as the whole of being and as the basis of all phenomena. The creators of naturalism deny the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul. John Dewey held that the acceptance of the existence of God in a certain way destroys the uniformity of reality and leads to a devaluation of the world (materialistic monism).

Forms of Atheism

Various forms of the negation of God have appeared throughout history and in our times. Atheism is a complex phenomenon that is affected by philosophical, psychological, social and cultural conditions. It is difficult to speak of any absolutely pure form of atheism, but in particular forms of the denial of God's existence we can distinguish the domination of a particular factor, most often a philosophical factor which allows us to make a certain systematization. There have been many attempts to systematize the forms of atheism. The first to do so was Johann H. Alsted in the 17th century in his *Encyclopedia*. Philosophical and theological encyclopedias systematize the manifestations of atheism in different ways. The most general and systematic is the division of atheism into theoretical and practical.

Theoretical Atheism

If we accept the classical conception of truth as the agreement of human knowledge with extra-subjective reality, and we follow Aristotle in accepting theoretical knowledge (beside practical and poetic knowledge), and recognize that man has a natural ability to know God, then theoretical atheism in the strict sense of the word cannot exist. God as a spiritual being is not an object of direct knowledge, and so we cannot state with certainty that He does not exist. As the history of philosophy shows, there are no metaphysical arguments for the non-existence of God. Atheism as it appears in philosophy and culture is either secondary to the accepted conception of the world and man (and especially of knowledge), or it is accepted *a priori*, or it has the character of a choice (a decision or option).

The situation in modern and contemporary philosophy, which accepts consciousness as its starting point, in a certain way facilitates the negation of God. The principle of reflection (immanence) blocks the way for man's natural inclination to know the truth about the extra-subjective world, including God.

Either human consciousness (the *cogito*) contains an *a priori* idea of God (as in the philosophy of Descartes and Kant), or it is directed toward various speculations resulting in a deformation of the idea of God, or it arranges man's thought so that the Absolute is meaningless or does not exist. From this philosophical perspective, the problem of God is locked either in the immanence of human consciousness (in human thought) or in the immanence of the world.

In theoretical atheism, there is a strict connection between metaphysical and epistemological solutions. Theoretical atheism may assume the following forms:

1. *Metaphysical atheism*. This includes all doctrines that hold to metaphysical monism (the homogeneity of reality). Metaphysical athe-

ism may be either (a) absolute—an explicit denial of God’s existence associated with materialistic monism (all materialistic trends, both in ancient and modern times), or (b) relative—the implicit denial of God in all philosophies that, while they accept the existence of an absolute, conceive of the Absolute as not possessing any of the attributes proper to God: transcendence, a personal character, or unity. Relative atheism is associated with idealistic monism (pantheism, panentheism, deism).

Pantheism and panentheism are doctrines that deprive the Absolute of transcendence to the world and man; this includes all doctrines that do not recognize any metaphysical difference between God and the world. Idealistic monism leads not so much to a denial of God as to a deformation of the idea of God. It has different forms, like:

- Spinoza’s pantheism, according to which only God is a real substance, while the world is a manifestation and emanation of that substance but does not possess any being distinct from the absolute substance of being. Hegel described Spinoza’s pantheism as acosmic, which is opposed to atheism insofar as the world is absorbed by God, and so it is something more than atheism.

- Idealistic pantheism, according to which God is the whole of reality as the absolute Idea, Spirit, or Self, which by a necessary (dialectical) development attains absoluteness, perfection and unity in many aspects (Plotinus, Herder, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel).

- Pantheism as pancosmism, according to which only the world is real, and God is the sum of all that exists (materialistic pantheism—Paul H. Holbach, Diderot, the Hegelian left).

- Naturalistic pantheism, according to which nature is the source of life and vivifies everything (the Stoics, the hylezoists, David F. Strauss, Ernst Haeckel).

- Panentheism which recognizes a partial difference between God and the world and establishes a new form of God’s immanence in the world. God is the immanent act in every organism in the world.

God's necessary relation to the world is an essential attribute of God (the philosophy of process—Alfred N. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne).

Deism includes doctrines that recognize God as the creator or organizer of the world, while denying that God has any relations to the world and man. The deists deny divine providence, any difference between good and evil and the moral attributes of God. They are opposed to Revelation, especially Christian Revelation (Wolter, the Encyclopedists).

2. *Epistemological atheism.* This is proper to all philosophical concepts that deny that man can know God or resolve the problem of God's existence. Agnosticism is the basic attitude of atheism for epistemological reasons and takes various forms, like:

- The agnosticism of immanence associated with the philosophy of consciousness or the philosophy of the subject, which leads human thought to the state where it is locked within the subject (consciousness) and where all differences between thought and being are removed, and ultimately consciousness is regarded as an absolute.

- The rationalistic agnosticism of Kant (and the entire Enlightenment), which rejects all sources of knowledge except reason.

- Skepticism—the position that we cannot resolve the problem of whether or not God exists (Pythagoras, Montaigne, Charron and Bayle).

- Methodological agnosticism—the position that recognizes only the particular sciences as having cognitive value and denies that science can go beyond the area of empirical experience. Methodological monism excludes metaphysics and theology, which are essentially connected with the problem of God, from the field of rationality (sensualism, empiricism, positivism and scientism).

- The agnosticism of the subconsciousness—this includes positions that exclude the problem of God from their natural philosophical or theological environment and connect the genesis of the idea of God

and religion with a purely fantastic hypothesis. Atheism becomes here a horizon of thought, a phenomenological domain or a doctrinal system (Freudianism, Marxism).

3. *Axiological (positive) atheism.* This chiefly anthropological atheism includes positions that reject the existence of God in the name of other values which are regarded as being in competition with God (a radical alternative). This is called positive or constructive atheism. It accepts a “higher” absolute and therefore negates the existence of God. This absolute may be Humanity, Science, Progress, History, and especially Man. The most radical and widespread are forms of atheism that absolutize or deify man and ascribe to him ontic and axiological self-sufficiency and the ability to resolve all problems without resorting to God. This is associated with the acceptance of new paths for man’s liberation (salvation), with man’s achievement of full development, with new ways of achieving happiness (Marxism, Nietzsche, Freud, and Sartre). The attitude of the representatives of anthropological atheism (humanistic atheism, Promethean atheism, atheistic humanism) is expressed well by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s saying: “Man becomes an atheist when he feels better than his God.”¹⁷

Practical Atheism

Practical atheism is the attitude of a person who lives *as if God did not exist*, who does not recognize any existential connections with God: God and religion do not have any existential value for him, especially, he does not see in God the end-purpose of his life (the good, love, salvation). Even if he does not deny God in his thoughts, he does not recognize any influence of God upon individual and social life.

¹⁷ “L’homme devient athée lorsqu’il se sent meilleur que son Dieu.” J. Lacroix, *Sens et valeur de l’athéisme contemporain*, 45. Cit. after André Charron, *Les catholiques face à l’athéisme contemporain* (Montréal: Fides, 1973), 349.

Purely practical atheism, like purely theoretical atheism, does not exist. There are common conditions between the theoretical denial of God (in thought) and the elimination of God from concrete life. The acceptance of the truth about the existence of God entails practical consequences, especially the acceptance of moral principles.

Practical atheism takes various forms:

1. It may occur among people who do not deny God's existence and who even regard themselves as religious believers, but who are not guided by any religious principles in moral life, who do not have any sense of sin, among whom prayer and religious practices disappear.

2. Laicization, which consists in excluding the problem of God and religion from intellectual pursuits and practical action at the individual or social level.

3. The atheism of indifference (indifferentism) is the lack of interest in the problems of God and religion, where people are absorbed in temporal matters (secularization, the influence of atheism upon daily life). An indifference to the problem of God presupposes that (a) human life runs its entire course upon earth (worldliness, secularism); (b) religion has failed to lead men to full happiness and to create the ideal conditions for life upon earth; (c) only a world from which God is absent can create the conditions for man to be fully present. People must build a "new world" without God and religion in the name of man (salvation without God).

4. The atheism of ignorance is the most dangerous form of practical atheism which consists in the complete absence of the idea of God in man's life. Marx advanced this type of atheism as the ideal attitude of man toward God. Marx held that God did not exist, but he stated that even if God did exist, nothing would change in his attitude toward God. Marx presented absolute indifference and ignorance of God as a fact and as an ideal—as an expression of man's ideal maturity at the individual and social level. The mature man not only denies the existence

of God, but also ignores God. Marxists call for a transition from anti-theism (the struggle against God and religion) to post-atheism as a structural element of the consciousness of the liberated man. Ignorance of God would be a higher form of the negation of God than atheism. According to the Marxists, the history of mankind after atheism would have a post-atheistic character.

The Causes and Motives of Atheism

The standpoint of atheism as a negation of God is secondary to the thought about God that spontaneously arises in man, is developed in different branches of philosophy (chiefly metaphysics), and is completed in religion (e.g., Christianity, by accepting revealed truths, provides a basis for the philosophical knowledge of God and broadens it). In the Christian world, reason and faith complement each other in knowing God; thus, atheism is primarily a negation (or deformation) of the idea of God as He is conceived in Christianity and associated with Christian culture.

How is the negation of God possible? And what are the causes of the phenomenon of atheism in its various forms?

The possibility of negating the existence of God is ultimately connected with the ontic and cognitive status of God and man. God as an ontically transcendent being is also transcendent with respect to our knowledge. God's existence is not directly accessible to man in knowledge by virtue of experience. Man's knowledge of God is indirect and is based on man's knowledge of the world of beings accessible in experience as he searches for their reason of existence. We are dealing here with a line of reasoning (an inference, a reflective act of knowledge) which is exposed to and can be misled by error. Furthermore, man may affirm that the thesis of God's existence must be accepted, yet he cannot know God's Essence (Nature) in an exhaustive

manner—neither in philosophical knowledge, nor even in religion and theology. God never ceases to be the Mystery to man, and man can never fully know God. God remains “known as unknown.”

On the part of man, many conditions come into play. Man is able to know that God exists. He is *capax Dei*. He possesses a natural desire to know God, yet in his natural (rational) investigations of God, he encounters many difficulties and obstacles and may err. St. Thomas Aquinas affirms this when he says that “the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors.”¹⁸

There are objective reasons for the difficulties in recognizing the existence of God and there are objective reasons for the negation of God’s existence. Aquinas called these to attention, and they are always present. They are as follows:

1. Physical and moral evil exists, and this poses a difficulty for many people in accepting the existence of God as the Creator of the world. The world seems too evil to be the world of an omnipotent God who is the Fullness of Good. The Good God and the presence of evil in His works seem to be irreconcilable to many people, and this may become a reason for rejecting God.

2. It may be due to the character of the human reason and the human will by which man acts. By reason, man knows the truth. By will, he adheres to the good (love). These faculties are part of man’s essence, yet since they are faculties of man as a contingent being, these faculties are not absolute. The reason and will should cooperate in harmony, yet they are exposed to the danger of errors and improper relations in the area of knowing the truth about God. The most frequent reasons for the negation of God are epistemological (cognitive) and

¹⁸ *S.Th.*, I, q. 1, art. 1, resp., in *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Second and Revised Edition, 1920). Available at: <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.

volitional (moral). They are: (a) the principle of immanence or agnosticism in all its forms, the horizontalization of knowledge (Kant, Hume, Comte); (b) the decentralization and depersonification of God (Spinoza, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel); (c) the deification of man (Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Sartre); (d) the domination of the will over the reason (choice, option).

Our knowledge of reality existing outside the human subject—spontaneously acquired in germinal form, in the light of the first principles (identity, non-contradiction, the reason of being), by virtue of the very human nature—raises the question of the reason for these beings which do not have to exist, that is, the question of God who transcends reality as it is accessible in immediate experience. This knowledge is developed and cultivated in the philosophy of being (metaphysics), which looks at reality under the general aspect of existence and is guided by the scientific question: “By what do those beings exist whose existence does not belong to their nature?” Thus, knowledge is based on causes (*habitus principii*) and comprehends all beings (the transcendental character of cognition), and therefore it can step beyond the world of immediately knowable beings which are unintelligible (absurd) unless we accept the Absolute Being as the ultimate cause of their existence.

In modern philosophy, because of Descartes, the essential connection between human knowledge and the world as it exists outside the subject was broken. Consequently, the connection between human thought or human consciousness and the God who exists outside of it was broken. Since Descartes, the problem of God has been connected with the *cogito*, with human thought or consciousness. The direction of cognition has been reversed. Instead of knowledge beginning from the existing world and moving to the subject, it is regarded as starting from the thinking subject and moving in the direction of extra-subjective reality.

Immanentism, Agnosticism, the Horizontalization of Knowledge

Descartes's principle of immanence inevitably leads to cognitive and ontological immanentism. Consciousness has itself as its object and does not need to search for its object outside of itself. Consciousness becomes the source and measure of existence. "To be" is the same as "to be in the consciousness." Human subjectivity, the transcendental act of the *cogito* as originating in the subject gives structure and presence to the object. Human thought (consciousness) is thus grounded in itself. Only that which corresponds to human thought has meaning. The truth of thought ceases to be important. What becomes important is appearance in consciousness. The absolutization of human consciousness or human subjectivity leads toward "pure" consciousness, toward an absolute which is thought itself.

Although Descartes accepted the existence of God (the idea of God is an innate *a priori* idea in human consciousness), the Cartesian *cogito* became an embryo for a deformation of the idea of God and the negation of God. By confining knowledge within human consciousness (which by its nature excludes transcendence), various systems (various ways of *cogitatio*) gave rise either to a conception of God as immanent to human thought or to an understanding of the human reason in which the problem of God is eliminated from the perspective of knowledge.

In his own way, Kant held on to the principle of the *cogito*. He regarded the human reason as constituting in part the object of knowledge. Although he did not negate the existence of God, he regarded the idea of God as an *a priori* idea of the theoretical reason. By his conception of science, he eliminated any possibility of knowing God from the rational (scientific) order and he definitively denied any possibility of metaphysical knowledge (any possibility of metaphysics as a science). He connected the problem of God (a postulate of God) with the practical order that was dominated by the will. He was con-

vinced that by eliminating God from the rational order, he was making room for faith in God, whereas in fact he provided the beginning of a radical epistemological agnosticism which in many cases led to atheism and the domination of will over knowledge.

In Comte, we see the confinement of the field of rationality and the horizontalization of human nature. These conceptions were widely propagated by his new conception of science in which man can know things given in immediate experience, describe and interpret them by expressing them in mathematical relations. This was the final elimination of the scientific question of "On what account?" and "For what purpose?" (efficient and final causes) from the field of rational knowledge, and thereby also the elimination of metaphysics. Positivism and scientism held the conception of knowledge that eliminated the problem of God from the horizons of knowledge.

Positivistic (scientific) agnosticism contributed to the creation of a scientific (technological) mentality that in turn could lead to practical atheism. Since it is impossible to resolve, within the confines of science, the question of whether or not God exists, and since the thesis that God exists cannot be verified empirically nor can it be proven by the methods of mathematical physics, people often conclude by establishing a norm of individual and social action: "Act as if God did not exist."

The Decentralization and Depersonification of God

Descartes's immanentism and Kant's rationalism and transcendentalism found expression in the absolutization of human thought and the human self, in the elimination of any difference between thought and being, and in the association of the problem of God with human thought and its speculative development. This found expression primarily in German idealism, in the philosophies of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. Their Absolute was confined within the immanence of human

thought and the world. God was subsequently detranscendentalized and deprived of subjective personal being. The Absolute became a product of evolution and was organically connected with human consciousness. Man stood in the place of God. God and man evolve in history to achieve their fulfillment in the future. In Hegel's interpretation, Christianity is the history of salvation, in which God emerges as the future resulting from a necessary development of the "idea of being" (the "absolute spirit").

The motif of the "God who becomes," the "Absolute of history," and of man as the place necessary for the becoming of God was taken up by the Hegelian left and radicalized by Feuerbach. Feuerbach advanced a thesis that in large measure became the source of contemporary atheism—man created God, God is a construct of man, and religion is a falsified consciousness.

Marx took up this motif. He replaced the Hegelian absolute idea with the absolute of evolving and self-sufficient matter. He made history into the place of man's becoming. Others replaced the idea of God as essentially connected with human consciousness with the idea of man as not only the place where God becomes, but man as God himself.

The Deification of Man

The dominant ideologies and philosophies of the 20th century propose a vision of God and man as competing and mutually exclusive realities. The philosophies of consciousness held that man is the source of truth, that he is self-sufficient in knowledge, and that he possesses within himself an unlimited source of power and freedom. At the same time, these philosophies held a concept of God that was deformed by pantheism, panentheism or deism. This point of view made it easier to present God as opposed to man, and man as opposed to God, and it contributed to the idea that we must make a choice between these realities: either God or man (*aut Deus aut homo*).

The opposition of God and man, and in a radical version, the positioning of man in the place of God, is characteristic of so-called positive atheism (the negation of God for the sake of a full affirmation of man)—Promethean (humanistic) atheism, which found its fullest expression in the philosophies of Marx, Nietzsche and Sartre. The negation of God became a necessary condition for the full affirmation of man, who was regarded as the only efficient cause and demiurge of his own history and the history of the world.

The Domination of the Will over the Reason

Atheism in the name of man and in the name of the absolutization of human values (such as freedom) ultimately has the character of a choice, a personal decision of the creator of a given ideology or philosophy. It can be exemplified by a passage from Marx's doctoral dissertation:

Philosophy makes no secret of it. The confession of Prometheus, "In a word, I hate all the gods," is its own confession, its own verdict against all gods heavenly and earthly who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the supreme deity. There shall be none beside it.¹⁹

Or, by Sartre's statement:

Existentialism is not so much an atheism in the sense that it would exhaust itself attempting to demonstrate the nonexistence of God; rather, it affirms that even if God were to exist, it would make no difference—that is our point of view.²⁰

¹⁹ Marx, *Differenz der demokritischen und epikureischen Naturphilosophie nebst einem Anhang*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, part I, VI (Frankfurt 1927), 10. Cit. after *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 5, ed. Manfred Henningsen (University of Missouri Press, 2000), 269.

²⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), 53.

Even in philosophies that attempt to show a theoretical foundation for the negation of God, the underlying motive is a decision to reject all dependence upon God, or a rebellion against Christian moral doctrine at either the individual or social level.

Thus, there are some forms of atheism in which the will is the deciding factor which refuses to accept the transcendent First Being, in which man says to God: “Non serviam,” with conviction that he will be “like the gods.” Moreover, various psychological, social and cultural factors may either help or hinder the discovery and affirmation of the truth about the existence of God. While the truth about God is a theoretical (metaphysical) truth, it is also a practical truth.²¹ God is the Highest Good for man and the affirmation of God is expressed in man’s entire moral and religious life. Dissent from the moral principles associated with religion may become a reason for the negation of God.

Man learns and achieves the ultimate truths and highest values together with others in society. Other persons may either help or hinder his access to transcendent truths and values. The cultural climate of the last two centuries did not favor the affirmation of God: the dominant trends of thought and the most influential ideologies were atheistic or even anti-theistic.

The contemporary forms of atheism were born in Christian culture. In the documents of Vatican II, the Church acknowledges that religious people may have contributed to the rise of atheism:

[T]aken as a whole, atheism is not a spontaneous development but stems from a variety of causes, including a critical reaction against religious beliefs, and in some places against the Christian religion in particular. Hence believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are

²¹ Moreover, religious experience (man’s recognition of God as the ultimate source of life and the Highest Good) is implicit in metaphysical experience.

deficient in their religious, moral or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion.²²

Conclusion

The history of modern and contemporary atheism—which is a mirror of human (mainly cognitive) errors (cf. the conception of knowledge as the ultimate source of the negation of God) in the area of the understanding of the meaning of life and its full development—shows that:

1. The history of the negation of God indirectly confirms the endurance of the idea of God and the affirmation of God throughout time; although there are various forms of the negation of God, the idea of God persists, for there is no ultimate negation that could resolve this question once and for all.

2. An erroneous conception of God could be a motivation for seeking a better understanding and expression of the truth about God in a more suitable and more easily understood language.

3. Systems that presuppose absolute atheism (like those of Marx, Nietzsche, Sartre) show that with the negation of God all other values collapse and are supplanted by relativism and, eventually, nihilism.

4. The myth of the “deified” man has not been verified in practical Marxism nor in the “supermanhood” of certain nations. The various absolutes that man has established—Man, Humanity, Nature, Science, History—are not sufficient, and ultimately along with the “death of God” they lead to the “death of man.”

²² *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 19. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, promulgated by Pope Paul VI (December 7, 1965). Available at: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/it.html>.

The experience of atheism thereby calls and challenges us to profit from its purifying character, cleansing us of false gods and deified men, and to come to a deeper understanding of the truth about man as a person who finds his true dignity, freedom and dynamism in God and in His creative and salvific love—“You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”²³

Since man is not God but has been created by God in His image and likeness, he may become like God by participation. He may become the co-creator of himself and the co-creator of the history of humankind so that by the power and will of God that history may lead to man’s full development, to salvation and to happiness.



ATHEISM IN THE UNIVERSAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY

SUMMARY

The author considers the problem of atheism. She discusses the history of atheism, forms of atheism, and the causes and motives of atheism. She concludes that (a) the history of the negation of God indirectly confirms the endurance of the idea of God and the affirmation of God throughout time; although there are various forms of the negation of God, the idea of God persists, for there is no ultimate negation that could resolve this question once and for all; (b) an erroneous conception of God could be a motivation for seeking a better understanding and expression of the truth about God in a more suitable and more easily understood language; (c) systems that presuppose absolute atheism (like those of Marx, Nietzsche, Sartre) show that with the negation of God all other values collapse and are supplanted by relativism and, ultimately, nihilism; (d) the myth of the “deified” man has not been verified in practical Marxism nor in the “supermanhood” of certain nations; the various absolutes that man has established—Man, Humanity, Nature, Science, History—are not sufficient, and ultimately along with the “death of God” they lead to the “death of man.”

²³ Matt. 5:48.

KEYWORDS

atheism, God, Absolute, man, religion, pantheism, panentheism, deism, agnosticism, skepticism, anti-theism, pseudo-atheism, post-atheism, Christian philosophy, *Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

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