

BAD ATHEIST MEMES

BORN ATHEIST



HELLO AND WELCOME

- We atheists have a number of things in our toolbelts, and one of those is memes.
- Many of these memes are oversimplifications or just flat out wrong, so I thought I would create a series to address some of our worst memes and explain why they are so bad.



**WE ARE ALL BORN
ATHEISTS**



**UNTIL SOMEONE STARTS
TELLING US LIES**

WE ARE ALL BORN
ATHEISTS

- Something that shows a *lack* of epistemological understanding is the claim we are all born atheists.
- This is a terrible take.

WHAT IS AN ATHEIST?

- An atheist is one who ascribes to atheism.
- Atheism is polysemous, which means it has many definitions.
- With the way language works there is no "wrong" definition, except for specific context (think of the use of theory in science vs the colloquial), but there are more logical or useful definitions than others.
- For example, we *could* define an atheist as anyone that picks their nose, but there is not much utility to that definition.

DEFINITIONS OF ATHEISM

Atheism has a number of definitions that we should explore to see if the work for the claim that babies are atheists. (This list is not exhaustive, just most common.)

- The Belief/Proposition God/gods do not exist
- Not believing in God/gods
- Lacking Belief in God/gods
- Not Being a theist

THE PROPOSITION GODS DO NOT EXIST

- With atheism being a proposition, for someone to ascribe to it, it would mean they accept it as true (believe it to be the case).
- A baby cannot consider the proposition, nor can it hold beliefs in regard to said proposition.
- Under this definition a baby is not an atheist.

NOT BELIEVING IN GODS

- When we speak of someone that does not believe in gods, we are generally thinking of a considered response.
- Even if you consider Flew in 1972 or Flint in the late 1800s they were talking about someone that had heard of God (or gods), considered it and found it unconvincing.
- In fact, Flew's verision was down to the concept of god being ill defined, kind of like what's known as agnosticism today.
- A baby cannot consider or understand the concept of gods so does not fit this definition.

LACKING BELIEF IN GODS



- Lacking belief in gods is often conflated with not believing in gods, however, there is a difference.
- When something is described as lacking belief it is meant as an absence of belief.
- Even this can have differing meanings.
- From one perspective it could apply as a response to theism, and just not hold the theistic belief (and therefore be absent of that belief). This still would not apply to babies.
- On the other we could talk specifically about the absence of the psychological state.
- If we consider this, we get to the absurd level where anything absent of that psychological state is regarded as an atheist and are left with silly ideas like; not only are babies atheists, but so are dogs, cats, rats, cabbages and even rocks.

NOT BEING A THEIST

- There are some atheists that regard this act of not being a theist the only qualification to make one an atheist.
- This again can reduce the atheist position to an absurd level where anything not a theist is an atheist.
- If we are to include things like rocks as atheists, this means atheism isn't a rational response to theism, and that many things we like to claim about atheists and atheism are not true.
- This also ignores the variety of different types of non-theists there are.



UTILITY

- There is not much utility to calling babies atheists.
- The general idea is to try and prescribe atheism as a "default state", yet through evolution we humans are prone to assigning agency, paranoia and superstition.
- Our default state is therefore a blank template with a tendency to (as our brain develops) hold beliefs, such as assigning agency where it is not present.
- Furthermore, even if we do regard all types of non-theist as atheists, what does it actually do to aid us atheists?

SUMMARY

- You're free to use whichever definition of atheism and atheist you like for yourself, but I would suggest not prescribing definitions on to others.
- Prescribing this definition on to babies doesn't actually do anything to strengthen the atheist's position and, in fact, shows weak epistemological understanding so could have the opposite affect.
- Regarding babies as innocents or ignorant might be better than referring to them in terms of psychological states they cannot hold.