

God Doesn't Believe in Creationists:
A response to the books of Ray Comfort
by Tucker Lieberman

Ray Comfort is a well-known evangelical Christian minister who worked in New Zealand and Australia before coming to the United States. He has been an open-air preacher, a prolific author, a blogger on atheism and the star of a viral web video on creationism featuring a banana. His newly-released book *You Can Lead an Atheist to Evidence, But You Can't Make Him Think: Answers to Questions from Angry Skeptics* (2009) has already enjoyed great popularity. Six weeks after its release, Amazon.com places it on the first page of its "Atheism" bestsellers. His earlier book *God Doesn't Believe in Atheists: Proof That the Atheist Doesn't Exist* (1993) isn't too far behind, keeping bestselling company with Bertrand Russell and Slavoj Žižek. If not for the irritatingly clever titles, however, his books would not be in that position. Their content is simplistic, unoriginal, and logically invalid.

God Doesn't Believe in Atheists was supposedly a response to atheism, but it was only atheism as imagined by a Christian, because it did not cite atheist thinkers. Sixteen years later, *You Can Lead an Atheist to Evidence* is a slightly improved version of the same theme. It is formatted as a Q&A with real questions that real atheists have posed to Comfort on his blog. Unfortunately, these questions are short, unscholarly, and vague, allowing Comfort ample room to misinterpret them.

To give a sense of what these popular books are about, I will analyze five main themes and explain why they failed to logically convince me of God's existence.

Trope 1: True atheism requires omniscience

What is Comfort's "proof that the atheist doesn't exist?" It is only the disappointing and silly claim that true atheism--the *certainty* that there is no God--would require omniscience. "If you insist upon disbelief in God," he advises, "what you must say is, 'Having the limited knowledge I have at present, I believe that there is no God.' Owing to a lack of knowledge on your part, you don't know if God exists. So, in the strict sense of the word, you cannot be an atheist." (*God Doesn't Believe in Atheists*, p. 15) I was not aware that the strict sense of "atheism" implies certain knowledge. His juvenile gambit on behalf of the *impossibility of denying anything* won't take him far. After all, what of his own repeated denials of evolution? "It doesn't matter how many thousands of years pass," he asserts confidently, "elephants don't have giraffes, nor do monkeys have men." (*God Doesn't Believe in Atheists*, p. 71) How does he envision himself escaping the snarky retort that, because he isn't omniscient and didn't witness the birth of every animal that ever lived, he cannot deny evolution? God doesn't believe in creationists!

Trope 2: Every building has a builder

"Every building has a builder." This is Comfort's ubiquitous argument for why living beings must have had a Creator. Of course, as has been acknowledged by theologians for thousands of years, this principle implies an infinite regress of creators. Who made God? No one, says Comfort, because God created time and nothing could have been created before time. This "solution" merely exchanges one problem for another: how could time have been created, if time is a pre-requisite for creation? Another, more subtle issue: Why does Comfort assume that because God *couldn't* have been created, therefore He *didn't need* to be created? Why not just go with the other option: He doesn't exist?

At times, Comfort says the burden of proof is not on the Christian. "We don't have to prove God to the professing atheist. This is because he intuitively knows that he exists." (*You Can Lead an Atheist to Evidence*, p. 9) How can he know what any atheist, much less all atheists, intuit and what proof they require? He doesn't acknowledge his own limitations, nor the burden of proof inherent in his own position.

Trope 3: Your conscience tells you God exists...or does it?

You Can Lead an Atheist to Evidence contains a hideously embarrassing contradiction. On page 8, Comfort says the conscience, rather than the intellect, testifies to God's existence and therefore the atheist's motivation for rejecting God "is moral. It's not intellectual." On page 35, he says the conscience has nothing to contribute whatsoever on this issue because "atheism is not a moral issue. It's an intellectual issue." On one of his central theses in a bestselling book, he blatantly contradicts himself.

(Comfort does not seem to be sensitive to contradictions in general. In responding to an objection that the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 contradict each other, he simply responds that they do not. Actually, they do, on the issue of whether plants were created before or after the first man.)

He is also unclear on whether atheists are moral. He acknowledges that studies have shown that stupidity and vice do not plague atheists any more than they plague Christians, and that people do not necessarily change their ways when they convert to Christianity, yet he insists on calling atheists "foolish" and "immoral." In some places, Comfort says the atheist has a working conscience and should recognize that it is God-given. In other places, he implies that the conscience doesn't function properly without the recognition of God. This is false, of course. A typical atheist certainly feels more restrictions on his behavior than "the bounds of a civil law he's ever expanding to accommodate his sinful desires." (*You Can Lead an Atheist to Evidence*, p. 17) I have a conscience; I merely have an atheistic theory about what it is, what it does, and where it came from. Even if I am mistaken in my atheistic understanding of how I am wired for morality, I am nevertheless capable of

decent behavior, which is far more important, and a point on which Comfort doesn't give me full credit.

Trope 4: The threat of Hell

If I believed in God and Hell, Hell would be a barrier toward my relationship with God. I don't wish other people to suffer harsh punishment for minor infractions; why should God enforce this? Comfort superficially explains that God is different because He is perfect and has more exacting standards, but this does not answer the question. We wouldn't consider it a perfection of our justice system to imprison everyone except repentant Christians. Why is God's moral perfection constituted by nitpicking and cruelty, when these things are not perfections in humans? Again, no explanation is given.

Trope 5: Always wear your parachute

A cornerstone of these books is Comfort's pervasive parachute allegory. He describes himself as being in the position of knowing a plane is going to crash and warning the other passengers to put on their parachutes. Many passengers do not listen due to their pride, laziness, or disbelief. Why not, he suggests, just put on the parachute--that is, faith in Christ--because it is harmless and it will save you if there turns out to be anything to be saved from? Essentially, this is a version of Pascal's wager.

Here is an explanation of why someone might not make Pascal's wager. To flesh out the same allegory from the perspective of an obstinate passenger:

Many people in the world claim to have invisible friends. They say their invisible friends give them information through prayer, text study, moral law, spiritual leaders, prophecy, and so forth. I notice that their description of reality and their prediction of the future is no more accurate than that of people who do not claim to have invisible friends. I conclude that the *invisible* friends are actually *imaginary*, and I am content not to have one.

One day, as I am flying, another passenger stands up and announces: "My invisible friend tells me that the plane is going to crash! Put on a parachute!"

Another passenger stands up and yells: "Don't listen to him! His parachutes are ripped. Use my parachutes!"

A third passenger argues: "My invisible friend slashed *all* the parachutes on board. He takes care of his chosen people, and as none of you were born into the correct lineage, it's too bad for you."

The drama continues:

"My invisible friend will give you a parachute, but you have to take a lengthy conversion class before you will understand how to use it."

"My invisible friend says planes never crash, particularly not when he's riding them."

"All the parachutes will work, even if they have holes, as long as you recite the proper prayer when you jump."

"The parachutes require more faith than that. You must decline to inspect your parachute and you must jump out of the plane before you even see evidence that the plane is in distress."

I strap on a parachute. It doesn't fit me. It constricts. I can think of nothing except removing it. Plus, upon inspection, it has holes I can put my fist through. I slip off the parachute and place my faith instead in one important observation: our plane is still flying steadily.

References are to the following books:

Comfort, Ray. *God Doesn't Believe in Atheists: Proof that the Atheist doesn't Exist*. (1993) Gainesville, Fl.: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 2002.

Comfort, Ray. *You Can Lead an Atheist to Evidence, But You Can't Make Him Think: Answers to Questions from Angry Skeptics*. (2009) WND Books, February 2009.