

# How Much of an Atheist Are You?

## Proxe Station Instructions

<h1>HOW</h1>	<h1>MUCH</h1>	<h1>OF AN</h1>	<h1>ATHEIST</h1>	<h1>ARE</h1>	<h1>YOU?</h1>
<h3>I believe...</h3> <p><small>Developing your belief system</small></p>	<h3>Are Values Just Constructs?</h3> <p>The nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or divine governance of human values. — The Humanist Manifesto</p> <p>Yes is [only] the gene's means of producing more genes. — Richard Dawkins, <i>The God Delusion</i></p> <p>Agree Disagree</p>	<h3>Good vs. Evil</h3> <p><small>How much do you associate with the following? (1 = Yes, 5 = No)</small></p> <p>There is no good and evil, only power, and those too weak to seek it. — Professor Quattri, <i>Henry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i>, p.209</p> <p>If evil exists, then good exists... If good exists, a world of evil exists for which to measure good and evil... If a world like earth, (then there must be) something that is incomprehensibly free of all stress, regardless of whether it is evil... — Bertie Bachstein</p>	<h3>How to explain your pain &amp; suffering?</h3> <p><small>How much do you associate with the following? (1 = Yes, 5 = No)</small></p> <p>If God exists, either He can do nothing to stop the most egregious calamities, or He does not care for God, therefore, is either ignorant or evil. — Sam Harris</p> <p>The [Dharma] book is more despicable than all else and is desperately sick — Jinnah Qim Shik</p>	<h3>If God exists, is God...</h3> <p><b>IMPOTENT</b></p> <p><b>POWERFUL</b></p> <p>E: X W: X L: X</p> <p>G: O O: O D: X</p>	<h3>People matter because...</h3> <p><small>How do they apply?</small></p> <p>of what they mean to me</p> <p>of what we can do for the world</p> <p>we are all connected</p> <p>we're intelligent</p> <p>we have merit</p> <p>we have individual personalities</p> <p>we're created by God</p> <p>if I can't see you, neither can you</p> <p>actually, we don't matter</p>
<h3>God &amp; Science</h3> <p>Science disproves God.</p> <p>Science and religion need each other.</p> <p>Agree Disagree</p>				<h3>What is the meaning of life?</h3> <p><small>Which of these apply?</small></p> <p>To enjoy or experience life</p> <p>To serve or worship God</p> <p>To love, help, or serve others</p> <p>To prepare for the next/after life</p> <p>Life is a mystery</p> <p>Life is meaningless</p> <p>To contribute to something that is greater than ourselves</p> <p>To become self-sufficient</p> <p>To end suffering (which means all of it)</p> <p>To make your own meaning</p> <p>Life is about or a job</p> <p>To be good to my family</p>	

## Background

The goal of this proxe station is to help students reflect on their worldview and its implications. Many college students have not thoroughly thought through their belief systems. While they say they believe one thing, in reality they are living out a different belief system. In this station, students ask themselves: What do I believe? Why do I believe it? What are the implications of my beliefs in real life?

This station was originally designed to engage with atheist students or those reading some of the more popular atheist literature such as Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, Sam Harris' *Letter to a Christian Nation* and Tufts Professor Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell*.

The station begins by looking broadly at the student's beliefs about God, looking specifically at the main objections to a belief in God:

1. Science disproves God
2. Objective truth including good and evil does not exist
3. The existence of pain and suffering disproves God

The second half of the station focuses on the implications of one's belief system. If we choose to not believe in God, where does our meaning and value come from?

The station begins with a broad question about belief in God. What does the student believe about God? Do they believe that God exists? And if so, is there only one God or do many gods/deities exist? The student's beliefs about the existence of God or gods serve as the foundation for their worldview.

The next slide examines the relationship between God and science. Often students see science and God as being mutually exclusive. To be a scientist, they feel a need to reject faith completely. Evolution and other scientific discoveries have disproved God and the Bible. However, science as a study of the natural order cannot prove or disprove God, since God is supernatural and therefore outside its field of study. Secondly, God and science are not mutually exclusive as is evidenced by many God fearing scientists and researchers such as Blaise Pascal, Gregor Mendel and Francis Collins.

The third slide looks at how one's world view accounts for good and evil in the world. According to Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, good and evil do not exist as separate entities. Therefore morality or an objective right and wrong cannot exist either. Conversely, Ravi Zacharias concludes that since good and evil do exist, there also exists some objective morality. This may pose problems for the activist student who wants to believe that genocide is wrong, but realizes that their worldview does not account for the existence of evil.

Following up on questions of good and evil is the question of pain and suffering. According to Sam Harris, the existence of pain and suffering in the world disproves God. If God were indeed good, then he would put an end to suffering. Since he chooses not to, this God cannot be good and must be either purely evil or incapable of intervening. Sam Harris fails to take into account issues of free will, the sovereignty of God and the incarnation. The second quote acknowledges the existence of pain and suffering in the world, but provides God's response to it. Ultimately God will destroy evil and heal humanity (Rev 21:5). The student here must question how their view of God accounts for pain and suffering in the world and subsequently, how the existence of pain and suffering affects their view of God. Does the Christian view of God provide hope for a suffering world?

The subsequent slide plays off of Sam Harris' quotation that since God is not good, he must be impotent or evil. The slide presents two dichotomies: impotent vs. powerful and good vs. evil. The student's view of the character of God serves as a foundation for all other beliefs.

The previous slides focused on objections to belief in God. The station now transitions to examine the implications of the student's belief system. The student's view of God will determine how they view their purpose in life. Oftentimes there are inconsistencies between what a student thinks about God and what they view their purpose to be. For example, they may desire to "contribute to something great than themselves" or "to end suffering" and yet their worldview does not provide them with an outlet for this.

The next slide focuses on the value of people. Most people regard their fellow human beings as valuable. However, this value is not always supported by their worldview. The student must ask themselves if human life has some intrinsic value or if a person's value is determined by their worth and accomplishments?

Finally, the station concludes by examining the concept of values. According to the Humanist Manifesto, human values cannot exist. Similarly, Richard Dawkins argues that sex is not in itself valuable. Rather, it is merely a device used for procreation. According to this line of thinking, there is no reason for monogamous relationships or caring for the poor or the elderly. The student who desires to not believe in God and yet have a high view of relationships or to care about injustice must acknowledge or reconsider the implications of their worldview.

#### Recommended Reading

Richard Dawkins. *The God Delusion*. Mariner, 2008.

Sam Harris. *Letter to a Christian Nation*. Vintage, 2008.

Gary Haugen. *The Good News About Injustice*. IVP, 1999.

## How Much Of An Atheist Are You? Proxe Station Script

### A. Intro/Invitation

Give an honest introduction as we invite people to interact with this.

- “Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I’m part of the Christian Fellowship on campus. We’re asking people to tell us how much of an atheist we are. Would you like to do our survey?”
- Take these sticker dots and go from left to right. I’ll ask you some questions at the end.”

### B. Follow-up Questions (Sharing, Supportive, Challenging)

- So what did you think?
- Did any of those questions stand out to you or interest you?
  - Possible sharing statement: Yeah, I liked the one that says...
  - Possible challenging question: Do you think that how we view people and values and meaning (on the right) is impacted by the upstream question of whether there is no God (on the left)?
- Do you think it’s important to figure out if there’s a God?
- Do you think it’s possible to figure that out?
- Possible supportive question: Do you have some kind of spiritual background? How have you evaluated that while you’ve been here at [college]?
- Possible supportive question: Have you ever evaluated the \_\_\_\_?
- Possible supportive question: What’s helpful to you – like discussion groups, books, etc. – as you think about this question?
- Possible sharing statement: Well here’s what I’ve found about that....
- So on a scale of 1 – 10, how much of an atheist are you?

### C. Closing

Thank them for their time and invite them to a follow-up event or GIG.

- “Well thanks for taking the time to do this. If you’re interested, we’re hosting a talk this Thursday called ‘How Much of an Atheist Are You?’”  
OR
- “There’s a group of people from this interactive display getting together later to talk about this more. (Show the Glad You Asked DVD) If you’d like to join, leave us your name and email.”

#### D. FAQs

Q: How can you believe in God when organized religion did so many bad things?

A: I think Christians and others did make mistakes, yes, and I really want to learn from that. But two things: (1) I don’t think that the teaching of Jesus was really responsible for that, and (2) organized atheism was responsible for more deaths in the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone than organized religion was in the previous 19 centuries put together.

16th century:	1,600,000
17th century:	6,100,000
18th century:	7,000,000
19th century:	19,400,000
20th century:	108,000,000

Q: Are you saying that atheists can’t be moral people?

A: No, absolutely not. Atheists can be very moral. But I am saying that atheists have to create meaning in a meaningless universe. But if we create our own meaning, it’s often irrational or not intellectually satisfying.

#### Dimensions of plywood display:

3 plywood sheets cut into (3) 6ft. by 2ft. sections for a total of (6) 6ft. by 2ft. sections. Home depot will do this in the store for you.

Hinge them together in pairs and paint black. Hinges were screwed through the plywood and into small pieces of wood so that the screws were not sticking out.

### Slide Dimensions

Each slide is 22" wide by 17" tall (that way you can create the slides using an 8.5 X 11 template in Word, or Publisher, or Illustrator or whatever and then just double the size when you get it printed. Make sure to get them laminated so that participants can write on them and apply stickers.)

## Training Student Hosts

Training student hosts well is a critical to the success of your proxe station outing. In order for it to be effective, your students will need to be comfortable with both the topic the proxe is addressing, and how to engage their peers well in meaningful dialogue and follow-up.

Some tips:

1. It is important to give the fellowship enough time to get acquainted with the station and the theme before using the proxe station in public. Ideally the proxe station would be displayed at large group a full week before the station is scheduled to be used.
2. Have students interact with the proxe station and use it as if they were random participants.
3. Have students sign up to participate and receive training.
4. Schedule a training event the night before the proxe station is scheduled to be used.
5. At the training, go over the concept and theme of the proxe station. Cast vision for the evangelistic impact this event will make.
6. Role play the follow up interview questions.
7. Role play the Gospel presentation using the scripture quotes embedded in the proxe station display.
8. Role-play praying for another person.

9. Spend time in prayer.

10. Finalize the schedule of who will host the proxe when, who will be praying when, who will be doing surveys/conversational evangelism when.

### Activities to use in conjunction with the Proxe Station:

Proxe Stations are most effective when used in conjunction with other evangelistic events that happen before, during, and after the station is displayed. Some fellowships have broken into three teams while the station is being displayed with one team praying for the event, one team doing surveys and/or conversational evangelism, and one team hosting the proxe station. These teams would then rotate so that each one had a chance to participate in all the activities. It is also helpful to have a large group event later that night or in the week that you can invite people to at the proxe station. Ideally, the speaker will preach on a topic related to the proxe station and include a public call to faith.

A few specific ideas:

1. Break into 3 teams the day of the event: an intercession team, a survey team, and a proxe hosting team. Rotate so that each team participates in each activity.
2. Partner with another non-religious student group that has an interest in the topic and co-host a panel discussion before or after using the proxe station.
3. Invite participants to sign-up for a topically related GIG.
4. Invite participants to a large group event with a related theme and call to faith.
5. Give away a book that is associated with the proxe station theme.
6. Invite participants to sign up to participate in a related, community service activity. For instance, if using the environmentalism themed proxe station, the fellowship could organize a letter-writing campaign to local legislators, or an event to raise awareness of a particular issue.
7. Invite participants to a prayer vigil related to the proxe station theme.