

Overview: The Human Predicament

The Problem:

Craig argues that contemporary theology must address the "human predicament"—the significance of human life in a post-theistic universe¹. He contends that if God does not exist, human life is ultimately absurd. This absurdity is not merely a subjective feeling but an objective reality resulting from the loss of God and immortality. Without these two necessary conditions, life inevitably lacks ultimate meaning, value, and purpose.

The Proposed Solution:

The author intends to demonstrate that Biblical Christianity succeeds precisely where atheism fails. It provides the necessary ontological grounding (God) and the necessary duration (immortality) to render life meaningful. Craig argues that even if the evidentiary warrant for theism and atheism were equal, a rational agent ought to choose Christianity because it is irrational to prefer "death, futility, and destruction" over meaning and happiness.

Instructor's Note: This chapter serves as **Cultural Apologetics**, distinct from traditional *epistemological* apologetics. It does not attempt to prove Christianity is true via evidence; rather, it explores the disastrous existential consequences if it were false.

I. Historical Background

Craig surveys four thinkers who analyzed the tension of the human condition.

- **Blaise Pascal (1623–1662):** Pascal viewed humanity as a paradox—both "miserable" and "great".
 1. **Misery:** Man is an infinitesimal speck in an infinite universe, plagued by uncertainty and death.
 2. **Greatness:** Man is a "thinking reed"; his dignity lies in his awareness of his wretched condition.
 3. **The Wager:** Pascal argues that since reason cannot decide God's existence, one must wager pragmatically. Betting on God offers infinite gain (eternal life) with no loss, whereas betting against God risks infinite loss.
- **Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881):** Focused on the implications of moral relativism.
 1. He argued that if God does not exist, then "all things are permitted".
 2. Atheism leads to a breakdown of moral obligation, resulting in destruction, suicide, or madness (exemplified by Ivan Karamazov).
- **Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855):** Defined three stages of life:
 1. *Aesthetic Stage:* Life centered on self and pleasure; ends in boredom.
 2. *Ethical Stage:* Life guided by objective standards; ends in guilt and despair due to inability to fulfill the law.

3. *Religious Stage*: Achieved via a "leap of faith," finding forgiveness and authentic existence before God.
- **Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984)**: Traced the "line of despair" in Western culture following the Hegelian denial of absolute truths. Without absolutes, humanity degenerates into absurdity, visible in modern art and the "Theater of the Absurd".

II. The Absurdity of Life without God and Immortality

Craig analyzes the implications of a naturalistic worldview through a tripartite framework: **Meaning, Value, and Purpose**.

A. No Ultimate Meaning

If the universe is destined for heat death (thermodynamic equilibrium) and individual life ends in the grave, existence is transient and ultimately insignificant.

- **The Threat of Non-Being**: Sartre noted that "several hours or several years make no difference once you have lost eternity".
- **Cosmic Futility**: If the universe ends in a cold, dark grave, it makes no ultimate difference whether it ever existed.
- **The Equivalence of Fates**: Without immortality, mankind is no more significant than a "swarm of mosquitoes," as the same blind cosmic process determines the end of both.
- *Supplement*: Craig notes that immortality *alone* is insufficient (e.g., the astronaut doomed to live forever in isolation); one needs both God (significance) and immortality.

B. No Ultimate Value

If life ends at the grave, there is no moral accountability, and if there is no God, there are no objective moral standards.

- **Moral Nihilism**: Moral values become merely by-products of socio-biological evolution or expressions of personal taste. One cannot objectively condemn acts like the Holocaust or praise acts of altruism.
- **Evolutionary Egoism**: Acts of self-sacrifice (e.g., the man dying to save others in the Potomac crash) are "stupid" in a purely naturalistic framework, as they contravene survival instincts without metaphysical reward.

C. No Ultimate Purpose

In a godless universe, origin and destiny are governed by blind chance.

- **Accidental Origin**: Man is the result of "matter plus time plus chance," a "lump of slime that evolved rationality".
- **Pointless Destiny**: The universe marches irreversibly toward extinction; there is no goal or *telos*.

- **Biological Determinism:** Quoting Richard Dawkins, humans are merely "machines for propagating DNA".
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III. The Practical Impossibility of Atheism

Craig's central critique is that **atheism is unlivable**. Atheists cannot live consistently with their worldview; they must "leap" to the "upper story" of meaning/value/purpose despite having no rational basis for doing so in the "lower story" of a godless, material world .

1. Inconsistency regarding Meaning:

Sartre attempted to create meaning through free choice (Marxism). Craig counters that self-created meaning is a delusion; pretending the universe has meaning when it objectively does not is intellectual dishonesty.

2. Inconsistency regarding Value:

Atheist humanists (Camus, Russell, Dawkins) are "patent moralists" who express moral outrage at injustice.

- **The Auschwitz Counter-Example:** Craig uses the horrors of Dr. Mengele's vivisections to argue that our reaction to such evil is not merely social conditioning but a recognition of objective wrongness .
- **The Contradiction:** Sartre condemned anti-Semitism as objectively wrong, yet his philosophy denied the pre-established values necessary to ground that judgment.

3. Inconsistency regarding Purpose:

Scientists often anthropomorphize nature (e.g., Crick spelling Nature with a capital 'N') or ascribe tragic dignity to scientific research (Weinberg).

- **Critique:** "Tragedy" is an evaluative term that has no place in a deterministic universe. In a purposeless cosmos, scientific research is no more significant than "slouching about doing nothing".
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IV. The "Noble Lie" and The Resolution

The "Noble Lie" Option:

L.D. Rue admitted that intellectual and moral relativism is the "lesson of the past two centuries". To avoid the "madhouse option" (pure selfishness) or the "totalitarian option" (forced

coherence), Rue suggests we adopt a Noble Lie—deceiving ourselves into thinking the universe has value to maintain social coherence.

- **Craig's Rebuttal:** The Noble Lie is self-refuting. Rue values social coherence and personal wholeness as *objective goods*, yet his philosophy denies objective goods exist. Furthermore, a lie loses its power once recognized as such.

The Christian Alternative:

Biblical Christianity supplies the two necessary conditions for a consistent life:

1. **God:** Provides the basis for objective meaning and value.
2. **Immortality:** Provides the necessary duration for purpose and accountability.

Conclusion:

While this does not constitute a proof of Christianity's truth, it demonstrates that Christianity is the only worldview that allows one to live happily and consistently. Cultural apologetics serves to create a "felt need" in the unbeliever by exposing the despair inherent in their worldview.