

Now think about the moral atheist who behaves morally because it is the right thing to do, even though there is no fear of a tortured afterlife for those who break moral laws. Which of you is more laudable? The person being good under threat, or the one being good on principle alone?

It's a question worth thinking about before you accuse all atheists of immorality.



DO ATHEISTS WANT FREEDOM FROM RESPONSIBILITY?

A Question of Moral Atheism

from blog.iamanatheist.com



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You might consider an atheist to be leaving a sinful life in the sense of breaking those of the Ten Commandments which demand worship and respect for God. But in that case, the original argument becomes, "You reject God because you want to sinfully not believe in God," and that's not much of an accusation.

STILL RESTRICTED

The biggest problem with this accusation is that it assumes that an atheist does not have a compelling, objective reason to behave morally.

A moral atheist has a strong, well-thought-out personal morality that plays an important part in everything he or she does. Atheists believe that lying, murder, stealing, infidelity, and a whole host of other behaviors are morally wrong, whether or not they lead to divine punishment.

If you are religious, ask yourself if you would behave immorally if you knew there was no God. If you say yes, then aren't you being moral only because you fear punishment?

IT IS NOT uncommon for an atheist to be told, "You reject God because you want to lead a sinful life without having to feel responsible for your actions." For a moral atheist, this accusation fails on at least three levels.

THE TRUTH

Moral atheism isn't about believing what one wants to believe, it's about believing what is likely to be true. An atheist cannot disbelieve in God solely because God punishes evil any more than an atheist could disbelieve in trolls solely because trolls eat naughty children.

Either God exists or God does not exist — personal desires have nothing to do with the matter.

A MORAL LIFE

Many — even most — atheists lead lives that are not particularly "sinful." The author of this tract is married, monogamous, honest, and polite, and does not smoke, drink, use recreational drugs, or gamble (aside from buying an occasional lottery). Does this sound like someone who has rejected God for the purpose of indulging vices?

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QUESTIONS OF MORAL ATHEISM: INSTRUCTIONS

We appreciate your interest in helping us spread information about moral atheism! To make copies of this pamphlet for your own use or to share with friends, follow these simple steps:

1. Print pages one and two of this document, one on each side of the same piece of paper (if you don't have access to a duplex printer, print page one, put the page back in the paper tray upside down, and print page two — depending on the type of printer, you may have to experiment a bit).
2. Cut the printout in two, using the thin rules across the middle of the page as a guide.
3. Fold the two pieces of paper in half, making a pair of small pamphlets.
4. Keep one of the pamphlets to read, and give the other away to an interested friend or stranger.

That's it! If you have any questions, suggestions, or comments, we invite you to share them by leaving a comment on blog.iamanatheist.org. Thanks!
