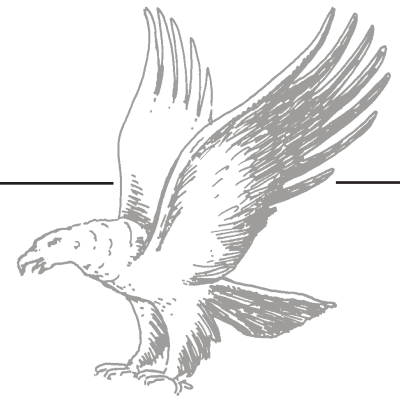


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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One Less God?

A popular atheist quip often leaves believers scratching their heads for a response.

But the fallacy in the argument is not hard to see, if we spend a little time thinking about it.

“We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one” (1 Cor. 8:4).

“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psa. 14:1).



If you follow the debate between theists and atheists over the existence of God, you have likely encountered this gem: *“I contend we are both atheists, I just believe in one fewer god than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours.”*

This argument—originating with an atheist in Virginia in the mid-1990s—is so pithy, so clever, that atheists enjoy trotting it out to make unprepared believers look silly. It’s a simple argument that packs a significant punch. How can Christians claim the intellectual high ground, when they agree with atheists regarding 99.9% of all god-claims? In reality, Christians are only one god away from atheism themselves.

It’s a clever soundbite, but like most clever soundbites, it is constructed on a logical fallacy.

A simple illustration highlights the problem. Suppose I meet the world’s most eligible bachelor, and he tries to convince me that I am a bachelor, too. He uses a similarly constructed argument: “Both of us are bachelors; I just have one less wife than you.” At first blush, he has a point. Out of the billions of women on this planet, I have only one, and he has none. That makes me awfully close to being a bachelor, right?

Except that I am *not* a bachelor. My protagonist has conflated two separate questions: “Am I married?” and “How many wives do I have?” Those are two distinct questions that must be treated independently of each other.

King Solomon was married, and so am I. Solomon had hundreds of wives; I have only one. But the distinction in *the number of wives* is unrelated to a prior question: *Are we married?* The fact that—unlike Solomon—I reject all other women in favor of just one woman does not make me a bachelor. By definition, the label *bachelor* describes one who is unmarried. When a bachelor enters a covenant relationship with a woman,

binding himself to her for life, he is no longer a bachelor. He has entered an entirely new category of relationship. (Which is why logicians call this kind of argument a “category error.”) From that point forward, the number of women to whom he chooses to bind himself is an entirely different concern.

That is the major weakness in this atheist argument. It conflates two separate questions: “Do gods exist at all?” and “Which gods are true/real?” By mashing both questions into a single declarative statement, the atheist has committed a logical fallacy that carries no weight whatsoever. Only by answering the first question, “Do gods exist at all?” can we proceed to address the second, “Which gods are true/real?”

The first question, of course, is the most relevant one in the debate. Christians believe in an immaterial, formless, timeless “first cause” for all that exists, and we appeal to rational evidence to support that belief. The nature and activity of that entity is a matter for further discussion, but we must start with the fact of His existence.

– David King