

The Search for Meaning| A1 Sample answer

Briefly explain two of the responses to the questions of life in: The secular humanist tradition, Atheism, Agnosticism or Reductionism

All of the responses to the questions of life which I will now discuss are different, yet they overlap in certain areas e.g. they are all non-religious. They all attempt to answer the questions of life. These questions include; Is there a God? Do I have a soul? What is the meaning of life? What values should I have? Many of these responses revolve around the interests of the individual rather than society. As I have previously stated, there are overlaps between these responses but there are also overlaps between them and religions in certain circumstances. Typical religious values such as honesty and justice are just as likely to be found in an atheist as in a Christian. As one of my best friends [atheist] once told me, “I don’t need the bible to know it’s wrong to kill someone.” humorous and true.

Atheism

“Tell me the reason you don’t believe in all other gods and that’s why I don’t believe in yours”

-Ricky Gervais [Atheist]

Atheism is the denial of God, gods and all divine beings. Theism literally means belief and Atheism is “without belief”, not too complicated a concept or too controversial an opinion-so why are atheists often viewed negatively in society? There are a few famous atheists in the world who use their non-belief as an excuse to attack believers e.g. Richard Dawkins. Richard Dawkins wrote “The God Delusion” a very famous book which discusses the faults in the belief in gods/deities. He uses science and reason to do so. This is called theoretical atheism; where the person does not believe in a higher being because they believe science and religion are incompatible. Such atheists would answer questions such as is there a God? with science.

Practical Atheism is where the person in question has no beliefs because the questions of life are irrelevant to them. They do not have a response to life’s questions. This can also be described as religious indifference.

Reductionism

Reductionism is the view of reducing an entity down to its smallest parts i.e. cells or atoms. Reductionists rule out the existence of speculation, opinion, superstition etc. Therefore by the definition of a reductionist, there can be no God or souls. We are a lump of organs and our life is meaningless. Any emotions we feel are mere chemical reactions happening in our brains. Viktor Frankl gave a very good interview with Stuart Kaufman about his opinion on reductionism. He tells the story of two men who have a dispute and bring it to their local Rabbi. One man claims he had two pounds of butter but his neighbour's cat ate it. The other claims his cat doesn't like butter and that the other man is lying. The Rabbi asks them to bring him the cat and he will weigh it. Miraculously the cat weighed exactly two pounds! The Rabbi Exclaimed "I have found the butter but now where is the cat?!". What Frankl meant by this story is that reductionists can sometimes be too exact and precise, allowing no room for wonder in the response to life's questions.