

Engaging Modern Atheism

Dr. Joseph Minich, Instructor

Course Description

In this course, we will carefully read and discuss the most comprehensive recent challenge to the Christian Faith, John Loftus' *Why I Became an Atheist*. Loftus is no typical atheist. He studied apologetics under William Lane Craig and has been key in reclaiming some of the best arguments against the faith, while also cultivating some of the more interesting recent ones ("Outsider Test of Faith"). This module will take his critique seriously, and afford students the opportunity to grow in their faith through exposure to intellectual challenges, but with the aid and guidance of fellow Christians and mentors to grapple with the material together. For many, a sufficient answer to Loftus will require a growth of imagination in order to see the grandness of reality and of history so easily obscured in these discussions.

Course Format

The format of the course will be predominantly one of guided discussion. The instructor will often be doing most of the talking, but generally to illuminate and draw out themes from the text for discussion, rather than in straight-up lectures. Thus, students will be expected to come having read and engaged with the text selection for the week, and with thoughts prepared to contribute. Classes will meet via Zoom for one hour each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who cannot participate. Additional student participation and instructor interaction can take place on our private Davenant Commons discussion board.

Course Objectives

This course aims (1) to expose students to some of the most competent critiques of traditional Christianity, (2) to dialogically engage, learn from, and help train students in the art of working through these intellectual challenges, and (3) to encourage students concerning the veracity of the Christian faith by means of an expanded (rather than calcified) imagination.

Course Requirements

1. Weekly readings (due before our session each week)
2. Weekly interaction with instructor and fellow students in online class session

Additional Recommended Course Elements

1. Participation on the course discussion board on Davenant Commons.
2. For any who are so interested, you might enjoy writing a paper tackling any argument that strikes you as a conundrum or which requires you to do a bit of research.

Course Texts

John W. Loftus, *Why I Became an Atheist*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2012). **Be sure to get the 2012 edition!**

Course Schedule

Week	Dates	Discussion Topics	Reading
1	2/2-8	Faith & Reason	Chapter 2
2	2/9-15	The Outsider Test of Faith	Chapter 3
3	2/16-22	God's Existence & Human Morality	Chapters 4-5
4	2/23-29	Science, History, and Miracles	Chapters 6-8
5	3/1-7	Witness of Spirit, Prayer, and Suffering	Chapters 9-12
6	3/8-14	Biblical Superstition & Authors	Chapters 13-14
7	3/15-21	The Old Testament vs. Reality	Chapters 15-17
8	3/22-28	Jesus' Divinity and Virgin Birth	Chapters 18-19
9	3/29-4/4	Jesus' Death and Resurrection	Chapters 20-21
10	4/5-11	The Devil and Hell	Chapters 22-23

Note: We will not formally discuss the Introduction, Chapter 1, or Chapter 24. They are all worth reading, but I do not want the class to overly focus on his personal narrative as opposed to his arguments. I will nevertheless make a suggestion about his rhetorical strategy for including this narrative in the first formal session. And, of course, anything can be discussed in Davenant Commons.