

# Atheism's Best Arguments?: Susan Blackmore

Source URL: <https://closerotruth.com/interviews/1846>



## Transcript - Long

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

Sue, take atheism, what are some affirmative arguments to show that is the correct way of thinking?

### Susan Blackmore:

The, the main reason seems to me that you can live a better life as an atheist. Think of the harm that religions do. Not only do religions start wars, but they cause people within the same town, within the same village, to be fighting against each other because they believe in a slightly different God in a similar religion. It's horrible. You can get right out of that. Atheism just, you know, it's not like another faith to set up against. It's just like, I'm not going to buy into any of those arguments. Let's actually live our lives with what we have. Let's try to be good people, build up nice communities, be kind and loving just because that's how we want to be. Forget all the god stuff.

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

So, in essence, an atheist would have an easier time not burdened with the religious conflicts. Is that what you're saying?

### Susan Blackmore:

I think absolutely right. I think you get rid of the religious conflicts. But then you can turn to questions of morality. See, a lot of people seem to think that if you did away with god and with religion, we'd suddenly all, I don't know, go out murdering old ladies or, you know, crashing into people for the hell of it, or stealing. I don't know, but we wouldn't.

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

Constant orgies.

### Susan Blackmore:

Constant orgies. Well, I might do that. But, but, you know, we are evolved, social animals with a whole lot of instincts for fairness, for sharing, for nurturing our children, for making friendships. These things are natural to, to how humans have evolved. So, what I think we need to do is to nurture those without having to say they came from God, without having to set up great rulebooks that are supposedly from God. And this is ever more important in the modern world where we are faced with so many ethical dilemmas about cloning, about GM food, about, I don't know, all kinds of, sex selection of babies, designer babies, implants in brains. I mean, all of these things, which religion can sort of pretend to say something about and find bits in the bible or the Koran or somewhere that might be applicable. But basically, those books were written in a totally different world. So, atheism is much better at taking those things and saying, right, what are we trying to achieve? Are we trying to achieve personal happiness, happiness of society, coherence, compassion? How can we do that and solve these ethical problems? Much, much better to do it from an atheist standpoint than to let a fictional god get in the way.

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

Yeah. How would the world be different if everybody were atheist as opposed to all the different religions in the world?

### Susan Blackmore:

Well, I'm afraid human nature is probably they'd find something else to argue about. They'd split off in different ways about beliefs in other things. I'm not, I don't think we'd suddenly have a perfect world. But we certainly wouldn't have some of the cruelty that goes on in the name of religion.

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

There must be something about individuals who are good people suddenly being energized and motivated to do some horrible things. And I have a sense that it's the, the injection into our normal human emotions and motivations of a sense of the ultimate. That once you have this ultimate connection, fictitious as it may be, with the Great Spirit or the consciousness or the true church, or whatever, and it suddenly gives you the license to do anything. And it, it frees you to do these terrible things.

### Susan Blackmore:

That's very interesting. The people who really, I think there is such a thing as coming in contact with the absolute. It's something like your ordinary sense of self and a separation from one another, utterly disappears and everything is absolutely as it is. And now, when that happens to people the very last thing they do is go around go around going oh, I've been in contact with the ultimate, you know. I mean, it just, because, because in itself, that kind of experience undermines that whole kind of self-stuff. And yet, some people get a sort of a glimpse, but they obviously kind of lose it. And they become all full of self-grandiose and, you know, I'm holier than thou and I'm in touch with the universe, I've seen God, and it goes off, and that's, that's just, I mean, humans are like that. The ordinary way of being human is to think I'm very important, I'm in here, and therefore I've seen God becomes yet one more way to make yourself feel important. And given, given license by religions to say, you know, if you've seen God or had a personal relationship with Jesus, that means you're a good person. Again, you can get away with doing bad things in the belief that you're good. Horrible, slippery slope.

### Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

Does it surprise you in an age of science, that the power of religion seems to be increasing, not decreasing?

### Susan Blackmore:

Oh, I don't know whether it surprises me. Yes, it does surprise me. Most of my life, religion here in Europe has just been gently going away. Lovely. And now it seems to be coming back in this horrible way with the Christian fundamentalism in the States, Islam burgeoning all over the place. I find it frightening and depressing and sad. I think I've got passed being surprised. It's, it's, it's sad. It's like going back into the Dark Ages. It's like saying, for all

that we've learned and begun to understand about human nature and our potential and what we are and how, how good we can be and what we're capable of. Instead of that, it's like oh let's go back and believe in, ah.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

But you're a scientist and you're a great student of human psyche, and so this is real. You can be sad, other people are happy, you're sad, I understand that. But why? Why is it happening?

**Susan Blackmore:**

Why is it happening? I think is because people are frightened. And when they're frightened, they will turn to something that will make them feel better. And feeling there's a God up there who cares about you and that there's a purpose in this life and that if you work hard and, you know, that all of these terrifying things going on in the world won't matter because in the end you'll be good and you're going to heaven. It's clinging onto that because the world is a scary place. And the scientific view, there isn't a scientific view, but the general gist, the way that science goes, is that this is just a pointless universe. We're here for no reason at all, we just evolved because we happened to evolve. Things just went this way. Everything you do is just part of an ongoing universe anyway. That's pretty scary and it requires confidence and learning and open mindedness, and a warm heart. It requires all kinds of things to be able to live with that. So, in a way, I'm not surprised that when life gets difficult and challenging and frightening, people hold onto the old certainties, even at the cost of denying truth and hanging onto falsehood.

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

And it's getting more.

**Susan Blackmore:**

It's getting, it's getting more because I think the world is becoming more frightening and more dangerous and more scary. I mean, look at the world now. We can no longer be isolated in our own communities and get on with that. We know that there are horrific things going on. We see it on the television, we know there are people being tortured even now. It's horrible to know that and not be able to do anything about it. You know, naturally, most of us would love to be able to stop it, and we can't. So, there's all that horror. Then there's the scariness of our own lives, which is so competitive. Our kids are pressured so hard to do so much because everything is going faster. There's so many choices. We're bombarded, not just going in the supermarket and there's 58 sorts of toothpaste and 117 different kinds of baked beans. But, you know, what careers we could do, what car, I mean, it's all ludicrous. And now we're beginning to reap the consequences of our profligate lives and the whole planet and global warming is going faster than, than anyone had expected. Certainly, five years ago I didn't think drastic climate change was going to happen in my lifetime and now I know it is. All these things are terrifying. I was about to say I don't blame people for clinging onto God, I do actually because they make it worse. But I can understand why they do. But what I would love to see is people saying, look what we've done. This is not, this is not about good and evil and God and Satan and stuff. It is about a biologically evolved creature that has gotten very clever, has got memes [ph], has memes off and spreading everywhere. The consequence is in danger of destroying its own planet. We've got to stop all this believing isn't God going to get us out of it stuff and actually make amends. Get a grip on this, believe what we are, little creatures, and try and sort ourselves out. And for that we don't want religion in the way.