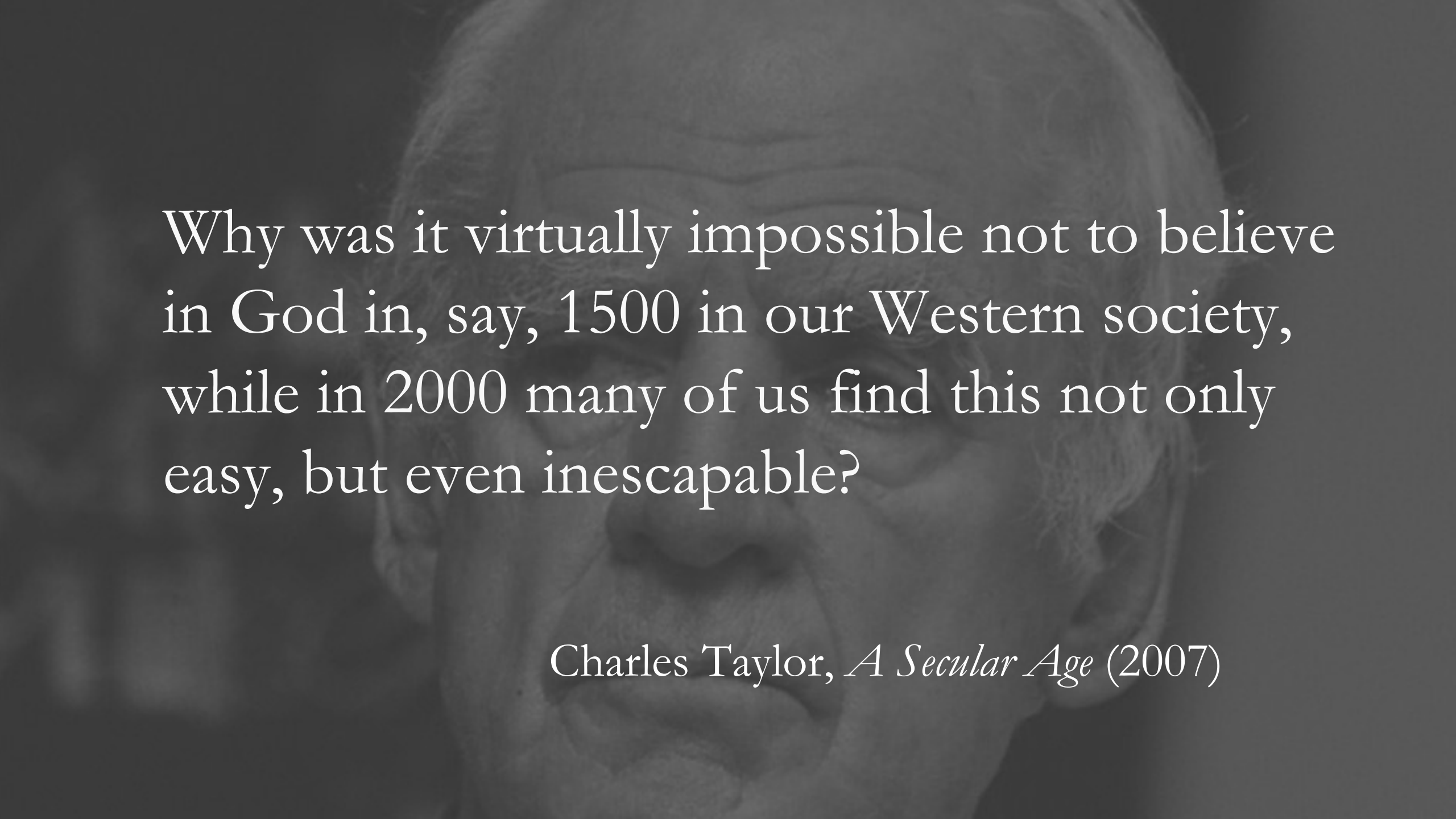


*How to Be a
Medieval Atheist*

Alec Ryrie



Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?

Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (2007)

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have
killed him ...

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom* (1882)

How to be a medieval atheist

I. The perennial
unbeliever

II. The Renaissance
unbeliever

Emperor
Frederick
II (1194-
1250)

Such a denial did not matter, historically speaking. ... It hardly deserves to be discussed, any more than the sneers of the drunkard in the tavern who guffaws when he is told the earth is moving, under him and with him, at such a speed that it cannot even be felt.

Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century* (1942)

How to be a medieval atheist

I. The perennial
unbeliever

II. The Renaissance
unbeliever

Pope Sixtus
IV's 1483 copy
of Lucretius,
De rerum natura

Rulers ... should uphold the basic principles of the religion which they practise. ... even though they be convinced that it is quite fallacious.

Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (1517)

Unarmed prophets ... who must use
persuasion ... always come to grief, having
achieved nothing.

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1513)

A prince must have no other object or thought, nor acquire skill in anything, except war.

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1513)

What indeed has death been able to accomplish as yet against Themistocles, Epaminondas, Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Caesar, Pompey, the Scipios, Demosthenes, Isocrates, Lysias, Homer, Pindar, Aristophanes, Cicero, Sallust, Plautus, Terence, Virgil, Ovid?

Etienne Dolet, *Commentaries* (1538)

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