

Does God Exist? Pointers to His Presence

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Note to readers: This essay is an expansion of my presentation as a part of a panel debate at Missouri State University in November, 2009. I was joined by two great colleagues, Dr. Zach Manis, a philosopher; and Dr. Greg Ojakengas, a scientist. We were part of a debate sponsored by the atheists and skeptics who organized a “Skepticon” Conference and are part of the Internet skeptics that form the informal, “Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster.”

I had the privilege of growing up in a home of free inquiry, intellectual delight, and moral integrity. My neighborhood was filled with friends from every background and race. Across the street lived Hungarian refugees from the 1956 Revolution. We had Jewish friends behind us, Catholic neighbors next door, and African-American and Hispanic friends around the corner. Believers and skeptics were coaching Little League and attending PTA meetings.

When I was 12 years old, my father wrote in his Harvard University twenty-fifth anniversary alumni journal that I was, “a fiery humanist and repressed basketball star (too short).” My pilgrimage toward authentic, intelligent theism led me to embrace faith as a young adult. I continue to examine the evidence for all faiths—or no faith—to this day.

I am a regional signer of the Williamsburg Charter, a celebration of the genius of the First Amendment. The first sixteen words therein allow people of all faiths or no faith to live peaceably with their deepest differences, even while we debate them passionately. My name is alongside atheists and believers—Eli Weisel, Norman Lear, Coretta Scott King, and Billy Graham.

Thoughtful people today are asking the important questions and testing long-held assumptions. The “new atheists” are challenging believers to examine their thinking. This can be a positive thing, if we do not make worldview decisions in a fit of reaction or because it feels fashionable. We need to read voraciously, listen deeply, and ponder humbly.

As theists, we answer the question, “Does God exist?” with a “Yes.” This affirmation does not claim that our arguments are airtight, or that we possess infallible proofs. We are standing for the affirmative with the understanding that religious belief is justified, reasonable, and warranted by a fair examination of the phenomena of human experience.

Richard Carrier, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and others assert that given enough time, all we experience and see is or will be explainable by natural processes. We do not need any supernatural intervention to account for anything. These authors spent decades refining their worldview of (meta)physical naturalism. They are well-read and superior rhetoricians. They have as much or more “evangelistic” passion for atheism as any outdoor preacher in Hyde Park, London!

Victor Stenger considers belief in God a failed hypothesis and that religious people have been indoctrinated. A fully liberated and thoughtful person will choose atheism if given an opportunity free from the debilitating effects of family and religious communities. His formidable mathematical and scientific gifts are evident. He does not, however, account for the “why” of the universe or the origin of the

“quantum flux” from which the universe emerged.

Theism does offer a cohesive perspective on the purpose of life. I offer several pointers to God’s existence that have yet to be decisively explained away by opponents. Any one of them alone may be insufficient for inquiring minds; however, the cumulative effect is positive for belief in God.

In the words of N. T. Wright, the thoughtful person’s **cry for justice** is one echo of the divine voice that seems universal and not reducible to biology. The companion to this *cri de coeur* is our **capacity for altruistic action and sacrificial love**. The moral argument remains compelling. Richard Carrier and others argue that one should be moral because, “Your life turns out better that way.” However, they acknowledge that there is no absolute reason for such an assertion. Relativism still wins, with all its chaotic consequences. Where does this cry come from? Why do we have a conscience? A Transcendent Source makes sense.

Our **love of beauty and extravagant creativity** is another pointer to a Creator. Beyond anthropological attraction for a mate, beyond religious ritual, humans create! We paint on cave walls, we sculpt figurines, and we devise new technologies. Rolf Jensen of the Copenhagen Institute calls the twenty-first century the Imagination Age. To paraphrase G. K. Chesterton, dolphins are delightful, but they do not construct bridges or buildings.

Our **consciousness or self-awareness** seems to distinguish us from our fellow inhabitants of *terra firma*. This may be the byproduct of evolution, but postulating that a Creator made a great distinction between humankind and the rest of creation is no less rational. Theists affirm that we are made of much of the same “stuff” as other animate creation; however, we also assert that the Divine breath gives us capacities that radically separate us from all other life forms.

Our **spirituality and capacity for supra-rational experiences** is another reflection of God. Yes, we can chart some of the places in the brain that induce hallucinations and other non-

rational experiences, but we cannot reduce ineffable dimensions of human life to mere neurons. Why do we keep on conceiving of a being of which no greater can be conceived? Our opponents want to invalidate all transcendent experiences, reducing them to epiphenomena of our particular biology and environment. Our opponents have argued that there is no proof for the supernatural and that there are millions of proofs of natural phenomena; therefore there is no need of God. In response I will only say that just one unexplainable miracle invalidates materialistic reductionism! For believers, answered prayers are still a valid testimony.

The testimony of history does not infallibly prove a particular religious assertion, but it demonstrates the continual attraction of faith and the contributions of theists to progress in all spheres of life. Intolerance and violence are the awful consequences of the cosmic tear that theists believe can partner with God to repair.

The complexity and diversity of the macro and micro cosmos draws us to the possibility of a Creator, and Sustainer of the Universe. This is as plausible as either something coming from nothing or postulating the simple eternal existence of the elemental building blocks of life. William Lane Craig’s assertion that we cannot traverse an infinite past is compelling. An absolute beginning is where the empirical evidence leads us; therefore, a First Cause is a rational explanation for the cosmos.

Finally, **the limitation of our knowledge is a call to humility**. My opponents point toward our advancements in scientific knowledge as a sign of no longer needing a God hypothesis. I think our advances in knowledge are wonderful, but they also reveal how little we know. *The explosion of knowledge in our Internet Age has not transformed our character, ethics or relational abilities*. We know more of the possible “how” of process, but we are no closer to our deepest question, which is, “Why?”

Theists must live with ambiguity and paradox, with unanswered questions and some axiomatic starting points. We can, however, demonstrate

that religious belief is warranted and does not represent a circumvention of critical thinking.

Our opponents look at the human genome and the laws of physics and see no god. Francis Collins, director of the National Institute of Health and one of the leaders of the Human Genome Project, sees **the genome and the mathematics of cosmology as the language of God.**

Our opponents see chaos, randomness, violence, and waste in the evolutionary process and state categorically, “There is no god.” Theists look at the same evidence, united with the beauty, functionality and power and say, “**What a wonderful but fallen world we live in.**”

Atheists point to the awful deeds done in the name of religion. This is a non-starter. The amount of evil waged by the irreligious against religious enemies is far greater, and the number of wars directly about religion are far fewer than the standard rapacious conflicts that mar our planet. One question to consider is how much worse life would be without religious moral codes. In the twentieth century alone, more than 150,000,000 people have been killed to fulfill the agendas of totalitarians who rejected the basic tenets of theism.

There is a standard atheist narrative that portrays atheists as courageous secular saints battling ignorance and intolerance and religious folks enslaved by superstition. History also demonstrates the courage of religious adherents battling prejudice and standing for victims of injustice. History is not a straightforward narrative of progress or regress, but multiple narratives that reveal the best and worst in human persons and civilizations.

Perhaps the greatest pointer to God’s existence is love. When we seek the good of others more than our own, we are choosing beyond pleasure, narcissism, or survival. Love is not the preserve of the religious, but is an indication that we are more than biology and physics.

Nurturing a baby, ameliorating suffering, and remaining faithful in friendship and marriage all posit that we are more than accidental and destined for more than decay.

Honest reflection reveals two realities. One is that most people do not come to faith or move away from faith on purely intellectual grounds. Usually there are critical events that propel a person in one direction or another. These events can be abusive and negative or affirming and miraculous. The other reality is that almost all of life comes down to relationships: with God, self, others, and the world. How we position these relationships and what we give and receive have much to do with what belief systems attract our attention. A child with an abusive but religious father may have some real questions for the Heavenly Father. A young woman away from home in a freshman philosophy class taught by a former minister-turned-atheist is impressionable toward skepticism. Conversely, an agnostic who is welcomed in a faith community may find him or herself praying and seeking to know God.

Christians must have the facts straight and sound arguments ready. At the same time, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to draw all people to faith in Christ. Arguments remove barriers and prepare the good soil for gospel seed, and intellectual integrity helps water the spiritual seed in those of a good heart who genuinely want to know the truth (John 8:29-32).