

“What is the Purpose of God?”

Dear Probe,

I was having an interesting conversation with an atheist over at Wasteland Of Wonders [an Atheist/Agnostic Website and Message board] when the topic of ultimate purpose came up!

Now most believers in God, myself included, seem to say that if the universe just *is*, then it becomes a big pointless absurdity, almost like a sick joke!

However if God exists then the universe and everything in it has a purpose, but the fellow over at Wastelands of Wonder with whom I was chatting said the following :

“Okay then, what is the ultimate purpose of God’s existence? Don’t you just have the same problem with theism, but pushed back a level? If God “just is,” what purpose then is there for your existence?”

I have to say this question reminds me very much of the infinite regression problem of “If God exists then who made God?!”

The best I could think of was that God contains an explanation for himself and that was it! This question truly had me bedazzled and I was scratching my head looking for a decent, non-cop-out explanation! [Like God explains himself]

So may I ask, if you were asked this question by someone what would you say?

Thank you for the interesting question! Let me try to answer it this way:

First, there would seem to be an important difference between the two questions, “Why does the universe exist?”, and “Why

does God exist?" Today, most scientists and philosophers believe that the universe had a beginning; it is not eternal. However, if God exists at all, He exists necessarily and is therefore eternal. Thus, even though each question is asking WHY something exists, they are each asking this about very different kinds of things.

Second, it's important for us to remember that purposes can only exist within a mind. The dictionary on my desk defines "purpose" as follows: 1. something one has in mind to get or do; plan; aim; intention. 2. object or end for which a thing is made, done, used, etc. Clearly, nothing which lacks a mind can have purposes of this sort. Whatever purpose there is for the existence of impersonal things must come from intelligent, purposeful beings. As a general rule, such beings would also be personal. Here I am thinking primarily of man, but also of God and the angels if they exist. Of course, some higher animals may have what might be described as very limited sorts of purposes for some of the things which they do. But generally speaking, purposes are the products of intelligent, personal beings.

Thus, if the universe is simply a "brute fact," and was not brought into existence by a purposeful, intelligent being, there can be no ultimate purpose for its existence. If nothing exists outside the universe then clearly, going back to the previously given definition of purpose, there can be no object or end for which the universe came into existence. The universe can only have some ultimate purpose if it was created by an intelligent being who, in fact, had some purpose in making it.

However, when we come to the question which you were asked, "What is the ultimate purpose of God's existence?", we need to pause and consider exactly what we are being asked. I think you are correct in seeing this question as a variant of that other, often-asked question, "Who made God?" While such questions can be asked, I honestly doubt whether they are

truly meaningful.

In the case of the question, "Who made God?", the questioner seems to be assuming that whatever exists requires a cause of its existence. But this is not true. Actually, it is only what BEGINS to exist that requires a cause. The universe began to exist; therefore, the universe requires a cause of its existence. But God never began to exist; He is eternal. It is therefore meaningless to ask "Who made God?", for what is really being asked is something like "Who made the Unmade Maker?", or "Who created the Uncreated Creator?" Clearly such questions are meaningless.

I believe that the question, "What is the ultimate purpose of God's existence?" or "Why does God exist?", is probably a similar sort of question. If the Christian God exists, then He is eternal. It is therefore unnecessary to posit a cause of His existence. Furthermore, if the Christian God exists, then He is the Creator of everything (other than Himself, of course!).

But now go back to our definition of "purpose" mentioned earlier and remember that, since God is the eternal, Uncreated Creator of all that exists, there was clearly no one other than God who might have had a purpose for bringing Him into existence. Additionally, it would also be meaningless to ask what purpose God had for bringing Himself into existence. The notion of a self-caused being is absurd. In order for a being to cause its own existence, it would first have to exist – which is obviously absurd. But if the purpose of God's existence cannot be explained by reference to an intelligent, purposeful being other than God, and if it can also not be explained by referring to a self-creative act of God Himself, I conclude that the question is probably meaningless.

Thus, while one can meaningfully ask about God's purpose(s) in creating the universe (and thus about the reason WHY the universe exists), one cannot meaningfully ask this question

about God Himself. Probably, the question is simply meaningless. But if not, we could not possibly know “the ultimate purpose of God’s existence” unless He tells us—and so far as I’m aware, He hasn’t done so.

Hope this helps.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“What is the Purpose of a Painful Death?”

I know that the Bible tells us that man is appointed to die. That from dust we came, and to dust we return.

My question relates to what purpose a painful, terrifying death serves in God’s plan. I realize that illness and tragedy can affect anyone at any age, but what purpose would God have (for example) for someone being trapped in a wrecked car and burning alive? I could give other examples of terrifying deaths that we all hear on the nightly news, but my question is: what is the purpose of the “way” we die? Why some die painlessly while others suffer a lonely, frightening death?

I don’t think I have the definitive answer, but as a person who has experienced various kinds of pain in my life, I know a little bit about the kinds of things God accomplishes in us during times of great pain.

A painful death is really just another life experience, so it doesn’t belong in a special category. One of the things that

we unfortunately can't know, because death prevents any communication with the departed, is the testimony of God's faithfulness and power and glory in that horrible experience. His grace, presence and aid is available to those undergoing awful deaths if they are willing to receive it.

It seems to me that because pain can serve to develop character and deepen the heart, it's entirely possible that a difficult death can be the final experience of pruning and preparation for life after death.

Those who "suffer a lonely, frightening death" are in a particularly wide-open position to experience the compassion and presence of the God who promised "Lo, I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). Just as even the smallest light is more appreciated in the deepest dark, I would suggest that the light of God's presence and love might be more apparent in a horrible death.

The testimonies of many of the martyrs who died excruciating deaths for the love of their Savior yet radiated God's peace and grace in the midst of great pain, is one of the things that leads me to this conclusion.

Granted, this would be about the death of believers. What is the purpose of a horrible death for unbelievers, I cannot say, but I still believe it has something to do with the light of God contrasted with the darkness of the heart.

The bottom line is that it is a mystery, I think, but this is the best I can do.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Should I Be Alarmed by the Concept of Christian Hedonism?”

I am alarmed to hear about a concept called “Christian hedonism,” which my wife encountered in a Beth Moore study. As we were beating this around, I checked on the web and found that there were some philosophers, like Erasmus and Thomas More, who attempted to syncretize religion and hedonism together. But I see a difficulty with this just like I see a difficulty with the term “Christian existentialism.”

The first time you come across the term “Christian Hedonism,” it really does make you scratch your head, if not blanch. I understand! But other writers are developing this idea, which actually makes a lot of sense when you get into it. John Piper’s book *Desiring God* is about enjoying God. Here’s a great explanation on that: http://www.desiringgod.org/library/what_we_believe/christian_hedonism.html

Actually, I think it’s a great concept because we evangelicals need to connect our heads with our hearts. For too long, Christianity has been nothing but an intellectual exercise, with our hearts going untouched and, in many cases, unchanged. What a travesty! When we get caught up in God’s “wonderfulness,” there is a whole new motivation to cooperate in His transformation of our lives and hearts; we can eagerly open ourselves to Him out of love instead of sterile duty.

So, bottom line—I think Christian hedonism is a great concept, and I hope it becomes increasingly contagious! <smile>

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

“How Does Pantheism View Good and Evil?”

I found your website very helpful in offering information on yoga and Christianity, especially Michael Gleghorn's [article](#).

I came across a quote for a guru:

Life has a bright side and a dark side, for the world of relativity is composed of light and shadows. If you permit your thoughts to dwell on evil, you yourself will become ugly. Look only for the good in everything so you absorb the quality of beauty.

Can you comment on how pantheism views evil and good? If you can shed some light on this quote, it would be helpful for me to understand how to address this with someone with this belief system.

Hello _____,

Thanks for your letter. Pantheism ultimately makes no distinction between good and evil. If all is one, and all is “God” (or Brahman), then the distinction between good and evil must ultimately be illusory. If not, then evil infects the very being of “God” itself. Thus, pantheism has a real problem with evil.

Of course, there is much truth in the guru's quote (although it's not terribly consistent with pantheism). However, one can find preferable advice (in my opinion) in the Bible. As Paul

told the Philippians, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things” (Philippians 4:8).

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“My Hurting Friend Has Stopped Believing in God”

I have a friend who has had a rough couple of years. Her parents split up and she doesn't like her mom's boyfriend and she recently told me she has stopped believing in God though she has been brought up to be a Christian. She just told me and a friend all this stuff and we don't know what to say, could you please help?

I wouldn't worry about what your friend is saying right now about not believing in God. Those are the words of a broken heart. Often when people feel God has abandoned them or betrayed them because He has allowed something bad to happen, they respond by saying, “OK, God, I'll show you, I won't believe in You anymore!” They don't really mean it. . . they're just hurting so bad they don't know how else to respond.

If she were my friend, I would just be there for her, put an arm around her and hug her and love on her, and silently ask God to love her through me. She needs friends, she needs

support, she needs to feel loved and cared for. That's how she'll eventually come to realize how God was loving her in her pain.

I also wouldn't get into any arguments about God. If she says things like "Well, I don't believe in God anymore, if God were there He wouldn't let stuff like this happen," I'd just nod and say, "Yeah, it really stinks what's going on, and I don't blame you for hurting so bad."

Just keep in mind what her heart needs instead of what her mouth is saying. And love her, love her, love her through it. Later on you can tell her you were doing it in Jesus' name.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

"I Battle Terrible Self-Esteem"

Dear Sue,

I read your testimony, [How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can't Change](#). I am not physically handicapped, but what about spiritual or mental handicaps? I not saying I am stupid or slow but things happened to me as a child that have haunted me all my life. I have a very low self-esteem and I don't feel like I am worth anything to any body. I feel more like a hindrance then a help. I am a Christian and I am spiriting, but strongholds from the past keep me in bondage. I have served the Lord most of my life and in many areas my life has

changed, but in this area of low self-esteem, I have prayed about it for so long without results, that I have almost decided to learn to live with it. If our God can heal the physical can he not heal the mental? Sometimes I get physically sick over this thing. As they say I am sick and tired of being sick and tired. This thing is so deep that I don't know what to do about it anymore. It is destroying my marriage and hurting my kids. It is a constant battle.

My mother died when I was about two-and-a-half and my father married again when I was five. I then had new brothers and sisters and the home life was not exactly Shangri-la. I ran away when I was fifteen and have never really looked back. I understand why I feel rejected but what I can't understand is why I can't get rid of it. I found the Lord when I was seventeen and it has been the best thing ever. I brought my husband to the Lord when we were dating and both my girls are born-again and serve the Lord. But why after all these years does this one thing still plague me? I have rebuked it until I wore my rebuker out. And still this thing is there. Sometimes it fades into the background but it is always there hovering over me. I am sad to see my family suffer because of my suffering. They do not complain but it makes me sad not able to fix this problem for their sakes. I don't know if you can help, but please pray that God will bring along the right person who can help me.

Dear _____,

Thank you for sharing your heart with me. I am so very, very sorry to hear of the heavy burden you have been carrying all this time. You must be exhausted!!

I can understand why rebuking this thing isn't working; it can't be overcome by rebuking anything. From what I understand of your life and your situation, you have been wounded by not just life but also by the lies of the evil one who wants to keep you in bondage to false beliefs. Since you are a

believer, you need to know who you are in Christ so you can replace the false beliefs with what is true.

For instance, you've been carrying the baggage of feeling rejected, but you won't be able to let go of it until you embrace the truth that you are "accepted in the Beloved," as Ephesians 1 says. And if God accepts you, you can choose to see yourself as acceptable. . . and you can choose to accept yourself. Listen—it's only been two years since I made a conscious choice to realize that God MADE me to be a self-accepting person, so I can accept myself!

The best resource I know of to help you grow in your identity in Christ is Neil Anderson's book *Victory Over the Darkness*. Another couple of excellent books that would help are both by Kay Arthur: *Lord, Heal My Hurts* and *Lord, Is It Warfare?* I promise you, _____, Satan doesn't want you to know and fully grasp the truth that you are a princess, a greatly beloved child of the King and the Bride of Christ. . . infinitely significant and valuable simply because God made you no matter WHAT happened after that! But Neil's and Kay's books are really good for helping people move out of the darkness of the enemy's lies and into the light of the truth.

I hope this helps.

In His grip,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"How Do I Find Out Who I Am

Inside?"

I have a question....I've been struggling lately with my identity. Not my identity in Christ, but who **I** am! I know what I want to do, I know what ministry I want to get in, I know my strengths and my weaknesses! But I've been trying to figure out who I AM!!! I'm not shy or timid, I just lack a persona, a character. I feel like sometimes (and I know this isn't true) that God has written the script for my life and forgot to write the character background. IT'S KILLING ME INSIDE, I FEEL SO EMPTY AND HELPLESS....How do I find myself, how do I figure out how I'm supposed to act, feel, think. People say "Well, you should be more like Jesus in what you do in your life and your personality" but I don't trust that response. How do I find my personality, I FEEL LIKE A SKITTLE WITH NO FLAVOR, I find it impossible to be me. Help!

A very wise man was teaching on boundaries and provided the most wonderful chart:

Who Am I?

I AM:

What I think / What I don't think

What I feel / What I don't feel

What I want or need / What I don't want or need

What I will do / What I won't do

What is acceptable to me / What is not acceptable to me

"Who I am" is the answer to these questions. It's not like a test where you sit down and fill in the blanks; it's more of a grid through which you pass the moments of your life, with these questions in the background. It takes a while to come up with a picture of who you are by finding out the sorts of things you like and don't like, what you think and what you don't think, what you want or need and what you don't want or need, etc.

For instance, there was a time in fourth grade when someone asked me who I was rooting for in the World Series. I didn't have a clue, not being a baseball fan. So I found out what team John Witten was for, since he was the love of my life at that point in time, and that's who I was for. But I really wasn't: the REAL me didn't care about baseball and couldn't care less who was in the World Series. But I didn't know that that was an acceptable answer. I do now! ☐

I would suggest you write these questions on an index card and carry them with you, and as your personal beliefs and preferences and surface, make a note of them. I think you'll discover who you are.

I hope this helps—I am very confident that it should at least help you get started!

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“The JW Argument ‘There Is No Soul’”

One of the Jehovah's Witnesses' arguments is that if Lazarus was dead and his soul was in Heaven, why would Jesus resurrect him? They argue, why would Jesus take Lazarus away from what surely is a beautiful and wondrous place. Thus, there must not be a soul and when we die we just die. How do I answer this?

Thanks for your letter. The issue of personal survival after

death (but before the resurrection) is best dealt with by an appeal to the authority of the Bible. If the Bible is a trustworthy revelation from God, and if the Bible teaches a conscious intermediate state between death and resurrection, then it logically follows that human beings do experience personal, conscious existence after death. So what does the Bible teach on this issue?

The Bible clearly speaks of personal conscious existence between death and resurrection. Indeed, even The New World Translation (1961), written by the Jehovah's Witnesses, seems to imply this. In Revelation 6:9-10 we read:

"And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those slaughtered because of the word of God... And they cried with a loud voice saying: 'Until when, Sovereign Lord holy and true, are you refraining from judging and avenging our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?'"

Here the author of the Revelation sees the SOULS of those killed on the earth. These SOULS are in the presence of God and clearly conscious because they ask God a question and even receive an answer (see v. 11). But how can this be if they do not really exist between death and resurrection?

Other verses which teach conscious existence between death and resurrection include Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; and of course Luke 16:19-31. There are many other which I will not take the time to list.

The JW's want to know why Jesus would raise Lazarus back to earthly life if he was already in a better place? First, although there may be a connection between Luke 16 and John 11, this is nowhere stated explicitly. Second, the Bible only hints at why Jesus raised Lazarus. It indicates that He raised Lazarus to inspire faith in His disciples (John 11:14), to reveal God's glory to the people (11:40), and to help the people believe that Jesus had come from God (11:42). But WHY

Jesus raised Lazarus isn't even the issue. Jesus may have raised Lazarus for very good reasons that He didn't bother to tell us. The real issues are:

1. Is the Bible a trustworthy revelation from God? and
2. Does the Bible teach that we have a soul/spirit that continues to exist between death and resurrection?

If the answer to both of these questions is "Yes," then it really doesn't matter if we can say why Jesus raised Lazarus. He did it, and regardless of the reason why, the story demonstrates that human beings experience personal, conscious existence between death and resurrection.

Hope this helps.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

**“How Should I Respond to
‘It’s All Right to Do
Anything as Long as It
Doesn’t Hurt Anybody’?”**

I have a question about some of the new age mentality that I have encountered in the more recent months. As apologetics is a bit of a hobby for me, I love learning what other people think and believe. It seems that as I ask around more and more, people are always saying the same thing. In more words

they always seem to say “I can do whatever I want as long as it doesn’t hurt anybody.” I know that this is by no means a new or uncommon answer, but it seems to be growing to me. Usually I address this with a series of questions which will cause them to backtrack and correct themselves, something like this: It is not all right to hurt people? Do you count as a person? Are you allowed to hurt yourself? Is emotional harm all right? How did you determine that it was not all right to hurt people? Who enforces this rule? Are you making a connection between church and state? How did the world come into existence? And so on. My philosophy is that sooner or later they will be forced to acknowledge that their view is full of holes, yet it appears to me that this way doesn’t work. I actually should have realized this sooner, because I now realize that those people really do not know what they believe, and that their choices are based on emotions. Thus, I am asking you how you would suggest responding to the view that “It is all right to do anything as long as it doesn’t hurt anybody”?

I’m afraid you’ve hit the wall of the skeptical postmodern mentality. When a person doesn’t believe anyone can know what is true about anything, and adopts the “true for me” mentality, the results are an amazing batch of contradictory ideas and no reason to try to make them consistent. People toss together beliefs according to what seems right at the moment, changing beliefs like changing outfits; ideas are subject to fashion just as clothes are. After trying to reason with people who think as you have described, you want to bang someone’s head against the wall – theirs or your own (I don’t suggest either!).

Because on the level of ideas contradictory beliefs can be held with such amazing ease, one typically cannot convince a person on that level. I say “typically” because some can be convinced at least that their ideas are inconsistent and that that is a problem. You just have to try drawing the person

into a conversation and see what happens. For many it takes real life situations to drive home the point.

I recommend you find a copy of Francis Schaeffer's *The God Who Is There* and focus especially on the last section: "Speaking Historic Christianity Into the Twentieth-Century Climate." He deals with this issue there. One of his main points is that any religion or philosophy which isn't Christian must result in some kind of inconsistency in a person's life because we were made by God to live in God's universe. False beliefs put us at odds with the universe and with ourselves. So, for instance, a person who says there is no difference between good and evil will be quite upset if you pour boiling water on him. He might even say you were wrong! Of course, I don't recommend actually pulling off such stunts to prove a point! What one can do, however, is gently (I Pe. 3:15) question a person about an inconsistency between what the person says she believes and how she acts. It's like turning a light on and letting the other person see the problem for herself.

One thing we apologists easily forget is tact. One person defined it as "the ability to make a point without sticking someone with it." Work toward encouragement and very subtle enlightenment rather than conquering in your manner. Be committed to truth, but also be committed to people and to showing the attractiveness of truth to them rather than whipping them with it.

If you have any questions after reading Schaeffer's book (or at least the above-mentioned segment of it) write to me directly.

Rick Wade

See Also:

[As Long As It Doesn't Hurt Anyone Else](#) by Rick Wade

“You Are Degrading Teenagers in Your ‘Safe Sex’ Article”

I just quickly glanced over your article about STDs and pregnancy ([Safe Sex and the Facts](#)). I was extremely set back by the hypocritical phrasing, “immature teenagers.” You may want to take a long, deep thought about how people could judge you at this time in your life. Just because teenagers may lack experience, “immaturity” would not be the word to use especially used in your degrading sense.

I think if you had read the article more carefully, you would have seen that I give teenagers a lot of credit where I know credit is due, as in this paragraph:

“Current condom-based sex-education programs basically teach teenagers that they cannot control their sexual desires, and that they must use condoms to protect themselves. It is not a big leap from teenagers being unable to control their sexual desires to being unable to control their hate, greed, anger, and prejudice. This is not the right message for our teenagers! Teenagers are willing to discipline themselves for things they want and desire and are convinced are beneficial. Girls get up early for drill team practice. Boys train in the off-season with weights to get stronger for athletic competition. Our teens can also be disciplined in their sexual lives if they have the right information to make logical choices. Saving sex for marriage is the common sense solution. In fact, it is the only solution. We don’t hesitate to tell our kids not to use drugs, and most don’t. We tell our kids it’s unhealthy to smoke, and most do not. We tell our kids not to use marijuana, and most do not.”

This paragraph puts my comment in context:

“Condoms are inherently untrustworthy. The FDA allows one in 250 to be defective. Condoms are often stored and shipped at unsafe temperatures which weakens the integrity of the latex rubber causing breaks and ruptures. Condoms will break 8% of the time and slip off 7% of the time. There are just so many pitfalls in condom use that you just can’t expect immature teenagers to use them properly. And even if they do, they are still at risk.”

The comment you found disgusting is not meant in a derogatory way, it is simply a realistic observation. My wife and I have raised two sons, now ages 22 and 24. They are certainly more mature than when they were 13 and 15. Even they would acknowledge that. Teenagers are immature in many ways and that is natural. They haven’t had many life experiences, especially sexually, to allow them to act as mature adults and make wise decisions. That was my point. From the statistics cited about teen sexual behavior, the immaturity shows. I also certainly understand that some teenagers are more mature than others. Not everyone fits a generalization. That is understood.

I’m sorry you interpreted the phrase as being degrading. That was not my intention and I see no reason to change it.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries