Does God Exist? A Christian Argument from Non-biblical Sources

Probe founder, Jimmy Williams, looks at evidence for the existence of God from multiple, non-biblical sources. He demonstrates that God's creation speaks to his creator. The important apologetic discussion forms the foundation for a complete biblical understanding of God and His purposes.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Metaphysical Options

Most will agree that the most basic, fundamental question concerning existence is not that *nothing* is here, but rather that *something* is here. I am a part of some kind of *reality.* I possess a consciousness, an awareness that something is transpiring, unfolding, happening. And you and I are part of it. The reality borne out of our personal observation and experience is that we are participants in a space-time universe which is characterized by a *series of events.* The mind naturally asks the question, "What is it?" Where did it come from?" Did the *cosmos,* what we see, simply come into being from nothing, or has this material universe of which we are a part always been here? Or is something or someone which transcends this material universe responsible for bringing it into existence and us with it?

All of these questions relate to the philosophical concept of *metaphysics.* Webster defines it thusly: *"That division of philosophy which includes ontology, or the science of being and cosmology, or the science of fundamental causes and processes in things."*{1} When we seek to answer these basic questions, then, we are thinking *"metaphysically"* about the

origin and the causes of the present reality. And at this basic, fundamental level of consideration we really are left with few options, or possible answers, to account for or explain the universe. The three potential candidates are:

(1) Something came from nothing. Most reject this view, since the very idea defies rationality. This explanation to account for the universe is not widely held. Kenny remarks: *"According to the big bang theory, the whole matter of the universe began to exist at a particular time in the remote past. A proponent of such a theory, . . . if he is an atheist, must believe that the matter of the universe came from nothing and by nothing."*{2} Since nothing cannot produce something by rules of logic (observation, causality), something is *eternal* and *necessary*. Since any series of events is not eternal (thus a contradiction), there is, therefore, an eternal, necessary *something not identical* to the space-time universe.

(2) Matter is eternal and capable of producing the present reality through blind chance. Carl Sagan stated this view clearly when he said, "All that ever was, all that is, and all that ever shall be is the Cosmos."{3} This second view has spawned two basic worldviews-*Materialism* (or Naturalism) and *Pantheism.* Both hold the premise that nothing exists beyond matter. Materialism therefore is atheistic by definition. Pantheism is similar but insists that since God does not exist, nature is imbued with "god" in all its parts.

(3) God created the universe. This view, *Theism*, holds forth the assertion that *Someone* both transcends, and did create the material universe of which we are a part. There are *no* other logical alternatives to explain the *cosmos*. Christians, of course, embrace this third view, along with all other theists, as the most reasonable explanation for what we find to be true of ourselves and of the world. Holding this view is not simply a statement of blind faith. There are sound and rational reasons for preferring this view over the other two. Theism is therefore a reasonable idea. In fact it is more reasonable to

believe that God exists than not to believe He exists. Theologians have posed several lines of "proof" to argue for God's existence. These arguments, while not *proving* the existence of God, do nevertheless provide insights that may be used to show *evidence* of His existence.

The Cosmological Argument

This argument centers around the concept of *causality.* Every event has a *cause,* and that includes the universe. It had a beginning. There was a time when it was not, and a time when it was:

> An **infinite** number of real parts of time, passing in succession and exhausted one after another, appears so evident a contradiction that no man, one should think, whose judgment is not corrupted, instead of being improved, by the sciences, would ever be able to admit it." (emphasis mine){4}

Hume is here arguing that time and space are *not* infinite, not eternal. If this is true, the universe, which is an "effect," had a *cause.* Robert Jastrow comments,

> "The most complete study made thus far has been carried out . . .by Allan Sandage. He compiled information on 42 galaxies, ranging out in space as far as six billion light years from us. His measurements indicate that the universe was expanding more rapidly in the past than it is today. This result lends further support to the belief that the universe exploded into being."{5}

He goes on to say:

> "No explanation other than the big bang has been found for the fireball radiation. The clincher, which has convinced almost the last doubting Thomas, is that the radiation discovered by Penzias and Wilson has exactly the pattern of wavelengths expected for the light and heat produces in a

> great explosion."{6}

Jastrow also concludes the universe is dying:

> "Once hydrogen has been burned within that star and converted to heavier elements, it can never be restored to its original state. Minute by minute and year by year, as hydrogen is used up in stars, the supply of this element in the universe grows smaller."{7} "Astronomers now find they have painted themselves into a corner because they have proven, by their own methods, that the world began abruptly in an act of creation to which you can trace the seeds of every star, every planet, every thing in this cosmos and on the earth. And they have found that all this happened as a product of forces they cannot hope to discover."{8}

Some have argued that an *infinite regress* of causes may not be logically possible. They say the universe is not a "whole" that *needs* a single cause, but rather that it is "mutually dependent" upon itself! Mutual dependence misses the point. The real issue is why there is an *existing* universe rather than a *non-existing* one. Reality and rationality suggest that every event has a cause. Whole series of events must have a cause as well (since the whole is the sum of the parts). If all the parts were taken away, would there be anything left? If we say *yes*, then God exists (i.e. an eternal necessary being that is *more* than the world. If we say *no*, then the whole is *contingent* too, and needs a cause *beyond* it (God).

We will conclude this section with an examination of perhaps the most often-asked question concerning the cosmological argument, "*Where did God come from*?" While it is both reasonable and legitimate to ask this question of the universe which we have just examined, it is irrational and nonsensical to ask that same question of God, since it implies to Him characteristics found only in the finite universe: *space* and *time*. By definition, something eternal must exist *outside* this space/time continuum. The very question posed reveals the

inquirer's fallacy of reasoning from within his *own* space/time context! By definition, something *eternal* must exist *outside* both time and space. God has no beginning; He ***IS****!* (Exodus 3:14).

The Teleological Argument

This second argument for the existence of God addresses the order, complexity, and diversity of the cosmos. "Teleological" comes from the Greek word *"telos,"* which means "end" or "goal." The idea behind the argument is that the observable *order* in the universe demonstrates that it functions according to an *intelligent design*, something undeniable to an open-minded, intelligent being. The classic expression of this argument is William Paley's analogy of the watchmaker in his book *Evidences.* If we were walking on the beach and found a watch in the sand, we would not assume that it washed up on the shore having been formed through the natural processes and motions of the sea. We would rather naturally assume that it had been lost by its owner and that somewhere there was a watchmaker who originally designed and built it with a specific purpose in mind. Intelligence cannot be produced by non-intelligence any more than nothing can produce something. There is, therefore, an eternal, necessary intelligence present and reflected in the space-time universe.

Until about five hundred years ago, humanity had no difficulty in acknowledging God as the Creator of the natural order. The best explanation saw Him as the divine Designer who created it with a purpose and maintained all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:17). But the rise of modern science initiated a process we could call the "demythologizing of nature," the material world. Superstition and ignorance had ascribed spirit life even to forest, brook, and mountain. Things not understood scientifically were routinely accepted to be unexplained, supernatural forces at work. Slowly, the mysterious, spiritual factor was drained away as scholars and

scientists replaced it with natural explanations and theories of how and why things actually worked. After Copernicus, human significance diminished in the vastness of the cosmos, and it was felt only time and research, not God, would be needed to finally explain with accuracy the totality of the natural order. The idea of a transcendent One came to be deemed unnecessary, having been invalidated by the new theory of natural selection.

Ironically, the same science which took God away then, is bringing back the possibility of His existence today. Physics and quantum mechanics have now brought us to the edge of physicality, to a place where sub-atomic particle structures are described by some as spirit, ghost-like in quality. Neuro-physiologists grapple with enigmatic observations suggesting that the mind *transcends* the brain! Psychology has developed an entirely new branch of study (parapsychology) which asserts that psycho-spiritual forces (ESP, biofeedback, etc.) actually function *beyond* the physical realm. Molecular biologists and geneticists, faced with the highly-ordered and complex structures of DNA, ascribe a word implying "intelligence" to the chaining sequences: the genetic *"code."* And we have already concluded that astrophysicists have settled on the "big bang" which seems to contradict the idea that matter is eternal, and, huge as it is, the universe appears to be finite. Whether we look through the microscope or the telescope it becomes more difficult in the light of experimental science to hold to the old premise that such order and complexity are the products of blind chance. The old naturalistic assumptions are being critically reexamined, challenged, and found to be unconvincing by many of today's scientists. Dr. Walter Bradley, Professor Emeritus of Mechanical Engineering at Texas A & M University states the case:

> "Discoveries of the last half of the 20th century have brought the scientific community to the realization that our

> universe and our planet in the universe are so remarkably unique that it is almost impossible to imagine how this could have happened accidentally, causing may agnostic scientists to concede that indeed some intelligent creative force may be required to account for it."{9}

Areas of reconsideration include cosmology and the origin of life, essential elements of design and their recognition, the minimal requirements for a universe to support both life of any type and specifically complex human life, why these requirements are met in our universe, and requirements for a place in that universe uniquely met by planet earth. All of these remarkable features of our world are being reevaluated and point toward intelligent design.

The Moral Argument

This argument for God's existence is based on the recognition of humankind's universal and inherent sense of *right* and *wrong.* (cf. Romans 2:14,15). No culture is without standards of behavior. All groups recognize honesty as a virtue along with wisdom, courage, and justice. And even in the most remote jungle tribes, murder, rape, lying, and theft are recognized as being wrong, in all places and at all times. The question arises, "Where does this sense of morality come from?" C. S. Lewis speaks of this early on in his classic work *Mere Christianity.* He calls this moral law "The Rule of Right and Wrong"—"a thing that is *really there*, not made up by ourselves."{10} For years Lewis struggled against God because the universe to him seemed unjust and cruel. But he began to analyze his outrage. Where did *he* get the very ideas of *just* and *unjust*? He said, "A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line."{11}

He goes on to suggest that there are three parts to morality. Using the analogy of a fleet of ships on a voyage, he points out that three things can go wrong. The *first* is that ships may either drift apart or collide with and do damage to one

another (alienation, isolation: people abusing, cheating, bullying one another). The *second* is that individual ships must be seaworthy and avoid internal, mechanical breakdown (moral deterioration within an individual). Lewis goes on to point out that if the ships keep having collisions they will not remain seaworthy very long, and of course, it their steering parts are out of order, they will not be able to avoid collisions! But there is a *third* factor not yet taken into account, and that is, "Where is the fleet of ships headed?" The voyage would be a failure if it were meant to reach New York but actually arrived in Buenos Aires (the general purpose of human life as a whole, what man was made for)![{12}]

The human conscience to which Paul refers in Romans 2 is not found in any other animal—only man. The utter uniqueness of this moral compass within humans, along with other exclusively human qualities (rationality, language, worship and aesthetic inclinations) strongly suggest that man not only has a relationship *downward* to animals, plants and earth, but also a relationship *upward* to the God in Whose image he is. As we saw God's great power and intelligence expressed in the first two arguments, we also see here that this sense of morality, not known in the world of nature, comes from the Great Law Giver Who is Himself in *character* the "straight line" (righteous, just, holy) against which all human actions are measured.

A Word about Atheism and Agnosticism

An *atheist* is a person who makes a bold assertion, "There is no God." It is bold because it claims in an *absolute* manner what we have stated above what is not possible: i.e., the existence or non-existence of God cannot be *proven* absolutely. It is also bold because, in order to make such an assertion, an atheist would literally have to be God himself! He would need to possess the qualities and capabilities to travel the entire universe and examine every nook and cranny of it before

he would ever qualify to hold such a dogmatic conclusion!

The most brilliant, highly-educated, widely-traveled human on earth today, having maximized his/her brain cells to optimum learning levels for a lifetime could not possibly *"know"* 1/1000th of all that *could* be known. And knowledge is now doubling by the years rather than by the decades or centuries of the past! Is it *possible* that God could *still* exist outside the very limited, personal knowledge/experience of one highly intelligent human being? Furthermore, before an atheist can identify himself *as* one, he must first acknowledge the very idea, or concept, or possibility of God so he can then deny His existence!

The Bible says that "he who comes to God must believe that He is. . ." (Hebrews 11:6). In other words, there is a "faith" factor relative to a belief in God's existence. But the dogmatic and bold assertion above is itself an expression of faith. It takes faith to believe God *is,* and it takes faith to say God *is not.* In my judgment, it takes even *more* faith for the atheist to believe in his position because he holds to his faith against overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Christians also affirm God's existence on the basis of faith, but it is a *reasonable* faith based on the true nature of the *cosmos*, not a *blind* faith.

Turning to agnosticism, Webster defines it as a position which states that "neither the existence nor the nature of God, nor the ultimate origin of the universe is known or knowable."{13} Here again is a bold statement: When the agnostic says, *"I don't know,"* what is really implied is "I can't know, *you* can't know, and *nobody* can know." Leith Samuel in his little book *Impossibility of Agnosticism,* mentions three kinds of agnostics: {14}

Dogmatic: "I don't know, you don't know, and no one can know." Here is a person who already has his mind made up. He has the same problems as the atheist above—he must know *everything* in

order to hold this position honestly.

Indifferent: “I don’t know and I don’t care.” It is not likely that God would reveal Himself to someone who does not care to know: “He who has ears, let him hear.” (Luke 14:35).

Dissatisfied: “I don’t know, but I would like to know.” Here is a person who demonstrates an *openness* to truth and a willingness to change his position should he have sufficient reasons. If such were the case, he would also be demonstrating what is true of agnosticism, namely, that it is meant to be a *temporary* path in search of truth which gives way to a more reasonable and less skeptical view of life and all reality.

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so they are without excuse.” (Saint Paul, Romans 1:20).

“Only the fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ” (King David, Psalm 14:1).

Notes

1. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., Publishers, 1953), s.v. “metaphysics”, 528.
2. Anthony Kenny, *Five Ways* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1969), 66.
3. Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), 4.
4. David Hume, *An Enquiry: Concerning Human Understanding,* Great Books of the Western World, vol. 35 (Chicago: William Benton, 1952), 506.
5. Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: W.W. Norton,, 1978), 94-95.
6. Ibid., p. 15.
7. Ibid., 15-16.
8. Robert Jastrow, “A Scientist Caught Betwen Two Faiths,” interviewed by Bill Durbin, *Christianity Today*, 26 (6 August 1982):14-18.

9. Walter L. Bradley, *"Is There Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Creator of the Universe?"* (lecture given at High Ground Men's Conference, Beaver Creek, Colo., Lecture given at High Ground Men's Conference, 2 March, 2001).
10. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan, 1943), 18.
11. Ibid., 45.
12. Ibid., 70-71.
13. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary,* s.v. "agnosticism."
14. Leith Samuel, *Impossibility of Agnosticism* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, n.d.).

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