

What makes you so sure God exists?

TEXT: various

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Scr. Reading: Ps 19

Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask

ILLUS: On April 12, 1961, Russian cosmonaut Yuri GaGARin became the first human to travel into space and orbit the earth. The blow to the American psyche at losing this leg of the Space Race was deepened when reports began to circulate that, during his flight, Gagarin had commented: “I don’t see any God up here.” (Just for the record, it seems Gagarin was a religious man himself, and the remark more likely came from a speech by Nikita Khrushchev.)

No matter who made the remark, when the majority of Americans heard it they were scandalized. Today, fifty years later, remarks like this come across to many Westerners as a cheeky joke. I recently heard a bit of standup comedy from about 10 years ago where the comedian got the crowd rolling by poking fun at belief in God: “So I respect all the different religions, but I will say that if you believe in any of it, you’re a moron. To me, it’s just people talking about their imaginary friend – at length – somebody who’s not there: ‘Have you met Cedric?’” The joke is obvious, right? If you can’t see him, he’s clearly not there. Hahaha.

Sometimes Christians are displeased by God’s apparent willingness to be ridiculed this way and remain hidden. After all, why doesn’t He just show Himself—prove to everybody once and for all that He really is there? Sure would make our lives and mission easier, wouldn’t it? If Yuri Gagarin had reached space and found a huge welcome mat: “Welcome to Space – Home of the Trinity!” Or if God would just answer our request for a miracle once in a while.

I think C. S. Lewis helps us see the error in this desire for absolute proof of God’s existence as he relates the story of his own conversion to Christianity in *Surprised by Joy*. Though raised a Christian, Lewis became an atheist at age 15, primarily through his struggle over the problem of evil. He later said that as an atheist he was “very angry at God for not existing.” Quick parenthesis here: Often this is true of atheists. Doug Wilson says atheism has two main tenants: 1. There is no God and 2. I hate him. So let me make a quick application right here at the beginning of this sermon. Most atheists usually have a reason they are angry at God. Ask what happened. Empathize. Sometimes you’ll need to help

them understand that lots of what people do in God’s name isn’t actually God’s fault. And remember that change comes slowly. Don’t give up on them. Love draws people, but disagreement often drives them away. And pray, pray, pray. End of parenthesis. Back to Lewis.

Slowly Lewis returned to theism, as he came to understand something of this point: that God is not beholden to us in our search for Him. In fact, since God is Creator and we are His creatures, anything we know about Him is completely at His initiative. Lewis likened it to the relationship between a playwright and his literary characters: “Even if my own philosophy [of God] were true, how could the initiative lie on my side? ...If Shakespeare and Hamlet could ever meet, it must be Shakespeare's doing. Hamlet could initiate nothing.” (*Surprised*, ch 14)

In other words, for us to look for God in space would be for Hamlet to search his attic for Shakespeare. If there is a God, He certainly isn’t going to be just another object in the universe for us to analyze. He would relate to us the way a playwright relates to the characters in his play. Whatever we know about Him, we know because He chose to write information about Himself into the play. (Keller, *Reason for God*, 126)

The point of the analogy, of course, is NOT that God is stingy with information or that we are merely fictional characters to Him. The playwright analogy illustrates this one thing: our complete dependence upon God for all information about Him. Thankfully, God has written all sorts of information about Himself into the play—a multitude of clues to His existence and character. There are literally dozens of fine arguments for the existence of God. I’ve attempted to select three that are fairly easy to understand, easy to remember, and powerfully convincing: origins, design, and goodness.

The Clue of Origins: Why is there something rather than nothing?

For as long as Christians have engaged their critics, they have pointed to the existence of the universe as clear evidence for God. The Bible itself claims that the creation confirms the existence of a Creator:

Psalm 19:1 *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*

Romans 1:20 *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

The argument seems clear enough to us: a watch testifies to the existence of a watchmaker. A creation testifies to the existence of a Creator. How could anyone think otherwise, right? It's the classic argument by cause and effect: every effect or result had to have some cause. It's one of the foundations of scientific inquiry: events have causation. Things don't just change, effects don't just happen on their own. Every effect has a cause, until you get all the way back to God—you've reached the ultimate Uncaused Cause.

ILLUS: At my house, I think we live in a pocket of the universe where we have daily uncaused effects: a mess in the kitchen, a tool left hanging in a tree, water in the tub, a bike in the driveway. I ask around, but most of these things happen at my house without a cause. In my mind, it's there, so surely somebody did it. But I guess not. My kids are great philosophers: "Uncaused causes, Dad!"

Theists of all kinds have long argued that God is the Uncaused Cause. When asked "Who caused God?" a theist would say, "No one. God has always been. He is self-existent. That's part of what it means to be God." Well, for centuries—well before Darwinian evolution came on the scene in 1859—many scientists and philosophers argued the same way about the universe. From Aristotle to Einstein, secular men and women believed that the universe simply had no beginning and thus needed no cause—sort of a pantheistic "universe-as-god" view that actually does work philosophically. Christians say about God, "No one created Him. He's self-existent." Atheists say about the universe, "No one created it. It's self-existent." The argument might seem unlikely, but at least it's not illogical.

But then, in the Twentieth Century, several scientific developments disproved the notion that the universe has always existed as an Uncaused Cause. Advancements, not by Christians but by secularists—Einstein's theory of relativity, the Hubble Telescope—proved beyond reasonable doubt that the universe actually had a beginning. In fact, twenty years ago the brilliant atheist Stephen Hawking admitted: "Almost everyone now believes that the universe, and time itself, had a

beginning at the Big Bang" (*The Nature of Time and Space*, 1996). Now, before you react against what he's saying because you heard the term "Big Bang," think about what he's actually admitting. Even atheistic scientists now acknowledge that the universe had an origin. It didn't always exist on its own. Something happened to bring it into existence. ***Before the universe, a big bang. And before that, nothing at all.***

So here are some questions we might ask our atheist friends:

- How, in your understanding, did the universe come into being?
- What prompted the Big Bang?
- Why is there something rather than nothing?

The very fact that the universe had an **Origin** implies that something began it—something that transcends time, space, matter, and physical energy, yet something powerful enough and intelligent enough to bring about all of this. Granted, this "something" does not necessarily have to be the God of the Bible. But the origin of the universe is at least a very important clue that someone like God does exist. Just on the face of it, atheism, with no God at all to initiate the Big Bang, would seem a less likely option than theism.

The Clue of Design: How did the universe get so fine tuned?

Psalm 19:2-6 ² *Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.* ³ *There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.* ⁴ *Their [the heavens'] measuring line goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them [the heavens] he has set a tent for the sun,* ⁵ *which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.* ⁶ *Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.*

David's meditation draws our attention to the finely tuned movements of the stars, particularly our own sun as it arcs across the sky. The Bible tells us there is precise design and order in God's universe. Science agrees.

Scientists tell us there are many fundamental regularities and constants of physics—the speed of light, the force of gravity, nuclear forces—all of which have values that must be within an extremely narrow range for

life to exist. Francis Collins, head of the Human Genome Project, explains:

“When you look from the perspective of a scientist at the universe, it looks as if it knew we were coming. There are 15 constants — the gravitational constant, various constants about the strong and weak nuclear force, etc. — that have precise values. If any one of those constants was off by even one part in a million, or in some cases, by one part in a million million, the universe could not have actually come to the point where we see it. Matter would not have been able to coalesce, there would have been no galaxy, stars, planets or people. That’s a phenomenally surprising observation. It seems almost impossible that we’re here. And that does make you wonder — gosh, who was setting those constants anyway? Scientists have not been able to figure that out.” (interview on Salon.com available at http://www.salon.com/2006/08/07/collins_6/)

Some scientists say there are 50 of these types of features, some say over 100—evidences of fine tuning in creation that give the strong impression that the universe and Planet Earth in particular were designed with human life in mind. Stephen Hawking himself was quoted on PBS as saying, "The odds against a universe like ours emerging out of something like the Big Bang are enormous. I think there are clearly religious implications whenever you start to discuss the origin of the universe. There must be religious overtones." Again, this isn’t conclusive proof of the God of the Bible; but it sure makes it look like someone designed the universe with human beings in mind.

So here are some questions we might ask our atheist friends:

- How do you think the universe got so finely tuned?
- What conclusion do you draw from the fact that the universe appears to be so well suited to human life? Is that an accident?

The Clue of Goodness: Where do we get our moral values?

Atheists often attack Christianity because of all the evil and suffering in the world: “If there is a God, why is my life so hard?” It’s an important question, and we will talk about it in a coming sermon. It’s the so-called “problem of evil.”

But there is an equal and opposite problem for atheism that we might call “the problem of good”: People everywhere have strong moral convictions; but without a belief in God, they have no place to base those convictions.

These days people like to say: "Everyone has the right to define right and wrong for him or herself." But who really believes this? The Nazis said they were doing a service to humanity by wiping out the Jews, but we know that idea isn't just impractical or mean—we know it is *wrong!* Not just “wrong for me personally” but wrong according to an universal standard of morality, a standard that exists apart from us and that all people are obligated to obey. It’s what God’s word describes for us:

Romans 2:14-15 NLT ¹⁴ *Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it.* ¹⁵ *They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.*

Think about our universal sense of moral obligation. Why do all people feel an obligation to help others in dire need? If someone falls in a river, people everywhere instinctively know they should help out, even jump in if need be. Evolutionary biology certainly can’t explain this! That trait certainly shouldn't have made it through the filter of natural selection—endangering self to help others. Self-sacrificing people would have been less likely to survive and pass on their "niceness" genes to their descendants.

Or think about "human rights." There is a growing consensus worldwide that every human being has inherent dignity and that we are obligated to order our lives in accordance with this fact. Human rights are fast becoming the universal language of politics and social movements worldwide. Why? Who says that the majority has no right to kill or oppress or silence the minority? Why is it bad to napalm babies or starve the poor or sell someone into slavery?

Questions we might ask our atheist friends:

- Aren't there people in the world who are doing things you feel they should stop doing? If so, doesn't that mean you *do* believe that there is some kind of moral standard people should abide

by no matter what they personally believe?

- Wouldn't nature tell us that it's normal and fine for the strong to bring violence against the weak?
- Why do people everywhere feel a sense of obligation to do what is right?
- Can you explain where human rights come from? Why should we treat women and minorities and disabled people equally?

Three clues for the existence of God:

- Origins
- Design
- Goodness

OGD. Or, if you rearrange them: "GOD." Not hard to remember. God, the Playwright, has written some significant clues into the play for us to ponder. As humble actors, we have to be thankful for the clues He has written into the script. But oh, how much more He's done than just write in a few clues. The whole Christian story is that God wrote Himself into the play in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the ultimate evidence for the existence of God. He is the main character in the play of history. His death for sin, burial in the tomb, and resurrection from the dead give us our undeniable proof that there is a God. He is there. He is not silent. He cares. And He has come to us in Jesus.

Next week: Jesus might have been a fine religious leader, but why do you think He is the Son of God?

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