

SOLVING THE GOD PUZZLE

CAN WE KNOW WITH
CERTAINTY GOD EXISTS?

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Solving the God Puzzle

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Imagine you are shipwrecked alone on a deserted tropical island, running a blistering fever and coughing so violently your lungs ache. Nothing but a few pieces of luggage have washed ashore, one of which contains a bottle of pills with a note that says “These tablets will either cure all tropical diseases or kill you on the spot. I’m not sure which.” You don’t know what you should do, so you decide to do nothing and hope for the best.

That’s what a lot people do when it comes to the question of God’s existence. Believing it’s like a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that isn’t there, they conclude that finding the truth about God’s existence is either impossible or so unlikely that it’s not worth trying.

But is it really that hopeless? Is solving the puzzle about whether or not God exists really that difficult? I hope you stick around to find out. If it turns out we can find a solution, nothing less than your eternal destination is at stake.

AGNOSTICISM

The belief that we can't know with certainty whether God exists is the bedrock principle of a worldview called "agnosticism." *Agnostics* are different from *theists* (people who believe God exists) and *atheists* (people who believe the exact opposite) in that they try to remain neutral on the subject, being willing to admit God *might* exist, and just as willing to admit He *might not*. Whether it's because they believe there's not enough reliable information to make a firm decision, or because they wish to avoid offending someone who has already taken a side, agnostics choose to opt out on the question of God's existence altogether.

Interestingly, there are a couple of aspects to agnosticism that many don't realize. First, though in recent years the word "agnostic" more commonly means "not knowable," its original meaning is rooted in what the ancient Greeks called "ignorance." Simply put, an agnostic was someone short on knowledge. Second, agnosticism is a worldview based on faith rather than fact. As a matter of fact, in one sense *all* worldviews are based on faith. Let me explain.

Theism, atheism, and agnosticism are all “faith-based” in the sense they cannot be proven true or false *just* by looking at evidence. That’s to say, *how people interpret evidence depends on which worldview they bring to it.* That’s why theists and atheists can both look at the same fossil and come away with entirely different conclusions about it. It all depends on which worldview they have already embraced.

Because a belief is “faith-based” doesn’t mean it is false, nor does it mean it is a blind faith without any evidence to support it. There can be very good reasons (and evidences) for putting one’s faith in a belief, as well as very good reasons (and evidences) for why not to.

Consequently, a worldview must first be evaluated on the basis of its rationality and logic (as well as how it lines up with reality) before we can know if it *rightly* interprets evidence. Since I suspect you want to be both rational and logical (and above all, not be “ignorant”), I’m guessing you want to see if your worldview passes the test. Keep reading and we’ll see how it measures up.

There are many versions of “theism,” with pantheism, polytheism, and monotheism being the most common. Throughout this booklet the term “theism” will refer to monotheism—the belief that there is only one God—and specifically the belief in the existence of the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible.

AGNOSTICISM'S UNDERLYING BELIEFS

We believe many things because we first hold preceding (or underlying) beliefs that give rise to them. For instance, we might believe it's a good idea to carry an umbrella with us because

we've first believed it's likely to rain. Or, we might believe we should fill up our fuel tank because we've first believed it will soon be empty. Agnosticism, like all worldviews, is arrived at the same way.

But are agnosticism's underlying beliefs really that solid? Do they



make sense, and do they give us good reasons for putting our faith in agnosticism? To answer these questions, we will examine some of the more commonly held underlying beliefs of agnosticism to see if they are illogical, or perhaps even “self-defeating.” Because there may be eternal consequences if agnosticism proves to be false, understanding its underlying beliefs is crucial.

When a statement is “self-defeating,” it means the statement can’t possibly be true because it cancels itself out. For example, the statement “I am certain we can’t know anything with certainty” is a self-defeating proposition. If we really are certain we can’t know anything with certainty, then the statement is obviously false. You might say self-defeating statements commit suicide every time they are stated.



We Can't Believe in God's Existence Until Science Proves It

When agnostics say there isn’t enough evidence to confidently believe in a supernatural God’s

existence, they usually mean there isn't the kind of evidence that will force people to believe in God even if they don't wish to. In a sense this is true. Scientists can't go into a laboratory and perform measurable, objective experiments on anything that is by definition "metaphysical" (something that transcends both space and time, like a supernatural God).

Conversely, atheists can't go into a laboratory and scientifically prove God *doesn't* exist for the very same reasons. Therefore, insisting on this kind of scientific proof of God's existence (or non-existence) is inconsistent with scientific realities, which makes it an irrational demand.



But there's another problem with this belief that makes it self-defeating. If we say we can't believe in anything unless science first proves it, then before the statement itself can be believed science must first prove the statement is true. Unfortunately for agnostics, there is no scientific proof the statement is true (otherwise, everyone would agree it is true,

which obviously they do not). In fact, most people (including agnostics) believe in all kinds of things science can't prove—like love, morality, and beauty. Consequently, we can't rely on science alone to tell us which worldview is true.

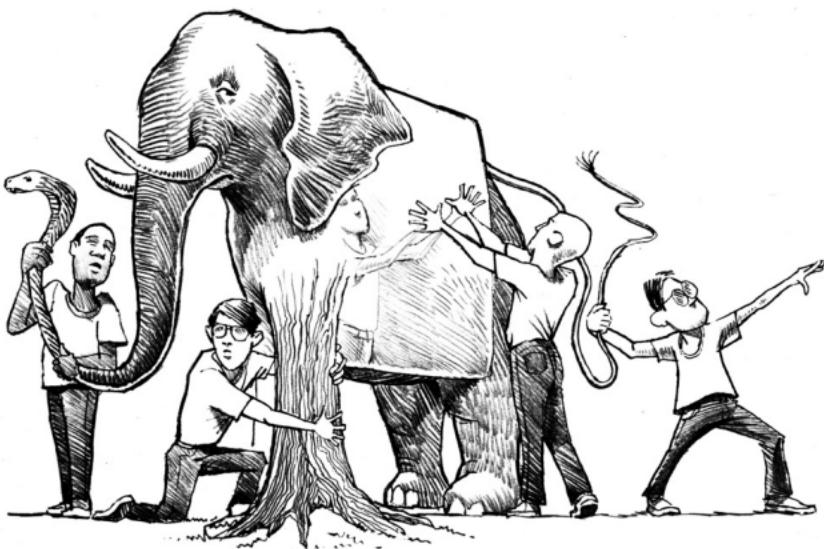


We Can't Believe in God's Existence Because We Are Limited

There is a well-known story about four blind men who attempted to describe an elephant just by touching the part of the elephant in front of them:

- The man standing by the elephant's trunk likened the animal to a snake.
- The one standing next to its leg likened the elephant to a tree trunk.
- The man standing along its side likened the creature to a large, smooth wall.
- The individual at its tail likened the elephant to a whip.

Because all four men had limited perception, none described the elephant accurately or in its entirety. Instead, they reached woefully



wrong conclusions because they believed their limited knowledge was the only knowledge that was available.

A lot of agnostics attempt to use illustrations like this to support the argument that because we have limited (finite) abilities to “know,” we can never know anything about God’s existence with certainty. But there are problems with this line of reasoning.

- First, not all people are limited in the same sense as these four blind men; otherwise, we couldn’t know what they were getting wrong in describing the elephant.

- Second, there are often ways to obtain information we can't see for ourselves. So while admittedly no single one of us can know *everything* there is to know about a given subject, we can know enough to make certain decisions about it provided we have a reliable source of information (more on this in a bit).
- Finally, using illustrations like this to support agnosticism is self-defeating. If everyone's ability to know is limited, then so is the agnostic's, including what he knows about God's existence. Simply put, the agnostic can't have it both ways. If it's possible he can know enough to conclude God's existence is unknowable, it's also possible he can know enough to know God exists if in fact He does.



Agnosticism Is More Tolerant Than Other Worldviews

Many agnostics think not choosing a side on the matter of God's existence makes them more

“tolerant” because they’re not saying either side is wrong. But is this really the case?

The first thing we have to understand is that tolerance doesn’t mean not taking a side on an issue. Tolerance means we make room for opinions or beliefs other than our own. While we might believe (for very good reasons) that a particular view is wrong, being tolerant means we still afford respect to the people who hold it.

Unfortunately, many have recently redefined tolerance to mean giving equal “value” to all beliefs, even when opposing beliefs contradict one another. “Your truth is your truth and my truth is my truth” is how we often hear it, and what it really amounts to is that no one can ever be considered wrong. That’s obviously illogical. We can’t rationally believe two opposing truth claims can be true at the same time and in the same context. For instance, we can’t logically believe the person who says $2 + 2 = 4$ and the person who says $2 + 2 = 5$ are both right. To believe at least one of them is wrong isn’t intolerant, it’s just common sense.

The illogical nature of this underlying belief also makes it self-defeating. If we believe no one can ever be wrong, then we must also believe no

one can ever be exclusively right—including the person who says agnosticism is true.



Agnosticism Is More Intelligent Than Other Worldviews

The belief that uncertainty about God's existence is a more intelligent approach is often the result of accepting the three underlying beliefs we've just examined. But as we've seen, those underlying beliefs are questionable for a number of reasons, which should make us wonder if agnosticism is a more intelligent worldview after all.

Another problem with this belief is that it's inconsistent with the certainty we want in most other areas of our lives. Imagine sitting on an airplane and hearing the flight attendant announce, "Welcome aboard Foggy Airlines! You'll be happy to know our pilot today is uncertain about how to fly this airplane." I doubt you would need much help in finding the nearest exit!

Finally, like the other underlying beliefs, this one is also self-defeating. If we equate uncertainty with intelligence, then we can't assert



we're certain that God's existence is unknowable without simultaneously associating the assertion with unintelligence. Perhaps we should see if certainty about God's existence and intelligence actually go hand-in-hand. After all, a little intelligence goes a long way when it comes to solving puzzles.



What We Believe About God's Existence Doesn't Matter

This may be agnosticism's most common, and most consequential, underlying belief of all. Obviously, if the claim that God's existence can't be known with certainty is true, we can all readily agree we have no idea if what we believe

about it matters or not. On the other hand, if we find that God's existence *can* be known, then what we believe about it may matter more than everything else we believe put together.

With this in mind I hope you'll keep reading. The importance of solving this puzzle may be greater than you thought.



THE VERDICT ON AGNOSTICISM

By now we've seen that agnosticism's underlying beliefs aren't as rational or as logical as many believe. When we add the fact that agnosticism is built on many self-defeating assumptions, we're suddenly forced to look elsewhere for the solution to God's existence.

But can either Christian theism or atheism pass the tests of rationality and logic? More im-

portantly, can either be worthy of our faith? I believe if we look at just Christian theism's underlying beliefs we can answer this question rather quickly. That's not to ignore atheism. It's just that atheism's underlying beliefs are usually the exact (or very near) opposite of Christianity's, so if Christian theism's underlying beliefs are rational and logical, it's safe to assume atheism's aren't. Let me show you why.

A CLOSER LOOK AT CHRISTIAN THEISM

Just like agnostics, Christian theists hold many underlying beliefs that point them to their worldview. Let's look at some of those beliefs and see how well they match up with reality. While we're at it, let's make certain they aren't illogical or self-defeating. If it turns out they are, Christian theism will fare no better than agnosticism as the solution to our puzzle.



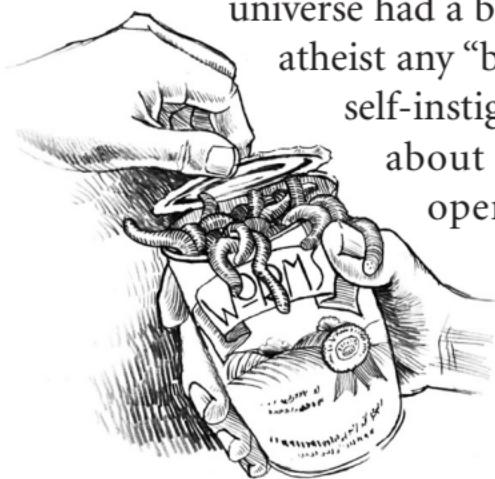
The Universe Had a Beginning

As previously mentioned, the worldview we bring to scientific evidence determines how we

interpret it, but Christian theism's belief that the universe had a beginning actually finds strong objective support in a scientific axiom called the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

Without diving into its complexities, this scientific reality tells us that over time isolated systems—like our universe—tend to become less organized (more chaotic) and have less available energy (like heat) doing any “work.” This means if the universe has always existed, it would have already degenerated into an unorganized, chaotic heap long before now, with too little useful energy left to sustain life. Because this obviously isn't the case, *we know our universe had a beginning—and a relatively recent one.*

Granted, not all atheists disagree that our universe had a beginning, but for an atheist any “beginning” had to be self-instigated. And as we are about to see, that notion opens up a whole new can of worms...

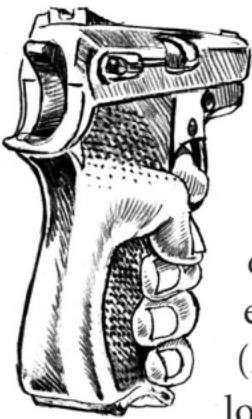


Though some believe our universe may be just one of multiple universes, or that it may have been spawned from a parent universe or a series of universes, throughout this booklet the term “universe” will refer to the totality of all space, matter, and energy since the beginning of time.



The Universe Had a Creator

Because our universe had a beginning, something other than itself must have triggered it. Guns don't shoot all by themselves, and things like universes don't just pop into existence out of absolutely nothing. That is, unless something causes them to.



Christian theists believe an eternal, uncreated creator must exist for anything else to exist. (Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher who lived centuries ago, called this uncreated creator “The Unmoved Mover.”) So why must the creator be both uncreated and eternal? Because there has

to be a first “uncaused” instigator (or cause) that causes everything else. Otherwise, we are forced to believe everything came from absolutely nothing: no space, no time, no energy, no anything. Not only that, we are also forced to believe that even if such a thing were possible (which it is not), it all brought itself into existence for no reason whatsoever.

Obviously, to believe everything came from absolutely nothing is absurd. There simply has to be an eternally existing first cause (creator) from which time and events began rolling forward. Not only do Christian theists believe this eternally existing first cause must exist, they also believe it is appropriately called “God.”

