

A Christian Examines Atheism

To Believe or Not Believe?

James Wright

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info@christianreadsquran.com

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DEDICATION

To the one who seeks and finds. To the one who leads and guides.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Books are built on centuries of human civilization. Ideas form and reform as they pass through many minds and hearts who test them carefully. Some ideas get tossed aside. Other ideas withstand the test of time. People take risks to defend the ideas even to risking everything. This book gratefully remembers all the people who took risks and overcame.

INTRODUCTION

In the last two centuries humanity has taken tremendous strides in understanding the world around us and the world within. In just one or two normal lifetimes we have advanced from riding on steam-powered trains to the first bulky internal combustion engine cars to jet airplanes and rocket-powered spacecraft. The advances are incredible. Will science someday explain everything?

Secular thought dominates the world's universities and educational systems. Secularism tries to explain everything naturally. Secularism denies God's existence. Modern secularists readily concur with Nietzsche that God died a very long time ago. Famous scientists like Stephen Hawking use their public status to deny God. If these brilliant men don't believe in God after thinking about it carefully, why should a simpleton like me say any different? Am I smarter? Do I have some information they didn't have?

Three Great Questions face everyone. Does God exist? Where did we come from? Do we have free-will? These questions resist certainty. Believers and unbelievers continually debate these questions. Why can two honest and intelligent people examine the same evidence and come to radically different conclusions?

Ideas drive movements which have consequences. Specific modern ideas helped produce two World Wars, the Holocaust, the rise of

Communism, the Sexual Revolution, and legalized abortion. These and other movements have shattered lives. Betrayed trust and continual suffering drive people to the edge of despair while the naturalistic worldview argues against any supernatural hope. This book offers encouraging ideas. Healing can be found. People can find their way back home.

Great Question #1

Does God Exist?



Chapter 1

Certainly Uncertain

Doubt, then, what to hold for certain, the more sharply gnawed my heart, the more ashamed I was, that so long deluded and deceived by the promise of certainties, I had with childish error and vehemence, prated of so many uncertainties.

– Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*

Does God exist? This is the most basic question of all. Can anything be produced to prove God's existence: empirical evidence, philosophical argument, eye-witness testimony, mathematical formulas or logical axioms? Proof in the modern sense generally means something physically tangible or something abstract that is logically necessary. Without such proof, the modern person simply shrugs his shoulders when asked about God.

The argument against the existence of God often follows these two lines: 1. No one has seen God or can produce any tangible evidence and, 2. The reality and prevalence of human suffering contradicts the

idea of a loving and all-powerful God. The modern mind rejects any suggestion that there might be something beyond nature...supernatural.

The Best Arguments

I come to this book with a curious background. I grew up in a place with lots of friends and neighbors who attended church meetings every Sunday. Many others drank whiskey and partied at the lake house all weekend. During college I met my first genuinely atheist acquaintances. I studied microbiology and my biochemistry professor and his wife were outspoken atheists.

When I first encountered intelligent atheists I was stunned. Their equation was simple. Theism = Stupidity. Atheism = Intelligence. In their opinion only foolish or uneducated people still believe in revelation from God.

How many people are like those professors? How many people think that belief in God correlates with IQ? Do only stupid, weak or foolish people believe in God? Interesting question. Did I want to be thought of as stupid? Who does? I was tempted to become an atheist to show how smart I really was.

My journey did not go the direction of unbelief. Somehow I got a copy of C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* and read it during long, boring hours of working at a small-town dry-cleaners. Customers only stopped by in the early morning and late afternoon, so I had many uninterrupted hours to digest Lewis' arguments. C.S. Lewis was a Christian and very intelligent. Is it true that Believing in God = Stupidity? Not at all. Even atheist Stephen Jay Gould admitted that there are smart people on both sides of the question. Some great people believe in God and some do not. Why do some believe and others do not?

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Always Arguing

Why is the problem of God's existence not solved? God plays the starring role in the most translated book on earth. The oldest stories of the human race center on this Great Question. Does God exist? Crowds gather at famous universities to hear both sides of the argument. Why is this question so hard? Why does no one ever land a knock-out blow? Why do the crowds always walk away still debating the question?

The Nature of the Argument

The argument about God's existence is a question of personhood. What is a *person*? We each experience personhood within ourselves. Oddly, personhood is not something we can smell, see, hear, touch or taste. It exists beyond the physical realm. Brain scans don't reveal personhood. It is doubtful that technology will ever reach the sophistication that it can take a picture of someone's memories, hopes, dreams, wishes and affections. The material world can only measure the material world. Electromagnetic and radioactive energy can measure physical forces, but how can they measure personal meaning? My personal *self* always seems to be looking into the world. If we can't understand our own human personality, how can we ever settle the question of God's personal existence?

If God exists, why has he not made it easier to prove? Throughout this book we come repeatedly to this puzzle. Why can't we be more certain? Why do all the best arguments never solve the puzzle? During the Soviet Union the atheist government put thousands of believers into prison. Their crime was believing in God. Atheism and theism struggled against one another. Like a chess game, atheism and theism seem locked in an eternal stalemate.

To believe or not believe, this is the question.

Not Enough Evidence

What evidence would convince an atheist, deist or agnostic that a loving God exists? One atheist answered, “I would believe God exists if he made this podium float in the air.” Another said, “I’d believe if I saw the letters YHWH etched on the surface of the moon or encoded in every strand of DNA.” These things might amaze us but they are not sufficient evidence. A floating podium could be the work of a skilled illusionist. Three or four strange “letters” could happen by accident. This kind of evidence is more like something a witchdoctor would believe, not a modern scholar. What kind of divinity would God be if he stooped to the level of making floating podiums? Not a very impressive one.

What could make a believer become an atheist? One person might say that after all their years of trusting God, nothing could persuade them otherwise. Someone else might say that a new scientific discovery about the origin of the universe could convince them that God does not exist.

Both the non-believer and believer alike must face an even more frightening question. Is there any kind of evidence that could persuade you to change your basic position?

Imagine an eternity of not knowing the answer. You sit in a blank, empty room with only one locked door and no windows. In your mind a single question burns, tormenting you for eternity. Is there a God? You never learn the answer to your questions.

The truth is that someday every knee will bow and every mouth will admit the truth about God. Even skeptics will finally learn if they got the answers correct or not. But this little story does illustrate an important point. First, even life after death does not necessarily prove the existence of a personal, loving God. The soul of the dead skeptic sitting in a blank room could wonder that perhaps a brilliant doctor

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had found a way to keep his brain alive in a vat. Choosing to believe in the existence of God requires a step of trust.

What is Faith?

Richard Dawkins said, “Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.”¹ Is faith a bad thing? Who wants to have faith? According to this definition, anyone with faith is a fool. What about a man of good faith, a trust-worthy person or a faithful business partner? Faith is not always foolish. Does Dawkins trust his own judgment? Maybe he is foolish to trust himself.

Here is a different definition of faith. Faith is a presupposition that matches reality as we experience it. Philosopher Alvin Plantinga calls this a Properly Basic Belief. No one has to prove to a little girl that her daddy is a real, spiritual person with a physical body. Billions of people believe that God exists? They aren’t research scientists. They simply presuppose he exists.

Pick Your Fairy Tale

Two fundamental, contradicting stories try to explain the universe. One story says there is no God. The other story says there is a God. Why do these two stories persist? Why does neither completely win the day? Both posit theories about “fairies.” These are entities beyond the reach of our five senses. The secular fairies are quantum energy fields and multiverses outside of our own time and space. They are the fairies of little, warm, prehistoric pools of water that allegedly birth life. Christians talk about a virgin birth and angels with swords of fire. Both secularists and believers think their fairy stories are true. But how do they come up with these stories? When placed in a balance, is either story more convincing than the other?

¹ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/richard_dawkins_141335.



Chapter 2

Yes, but...

Does God exist or not? This question stubbornly resists certainty. Try searching the internet for the words atheism, Christianity and God. The word “atheism” generates 64 million sites. “Christianity” generates 228 million. Typing in “Is there a God?” yields 11 million hits. There is certainly great interest in the question of his existence.

Reviewing centuries of intellectual thought we can see several interesting attempts to deal with the question of God’s existence. What factors moved some people toward theism or pushed them away? Is there a deeper reason why this question resists certainty? Here is a brief historical overview of how some people have sought to answer the question.

Plato’s Beauty and Goodness

The idyllic climate, pristine beaches and lofty mountains of Greece must have created a very healthy inner life of the mind. The beautiful

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land of ancient Greece produced the famous philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. They gave the world some of its best human thought as they worked with concepts of existence, morality, government and metaphysics.

The children of Abraham lived far down the seacoast from Greece. Greek philosophers probably had little direct contact with ancient Jewish scholarship. Jewish monotheism took a much different shape from the polytheism of Greek mythology. The Greeks lived without a prophetic tradition through which God spoke to his people and acted in history to reveal himself.² While Abraham's offspring watched the Red Sea swallow Egyptian chariots and listened to the Torah, the Greeks sat in their colonnaded cities and speculated about the nature of reality. Without a tradition of prophetic revelation, did the Greeks have any conception of God?

Yes, they did.

Plato worked with the concept of the ideal. For every object he envisioned an ideal form. A keen observer, he perceived the existence of two abstracts, beauty and goodness.

What did Plato know of the universe in those days? Without a telescope he could have only imagined the vastness and grandeur of the universe. Yet sitting under the Greek night sky, he could see the glory of the Milky Way, shooting stars, comets and all the other stunning astronomical events of his time. He felt moved by such experiences. He called them beautiful. He also considered them good. What is the source of sublime beauty and goodness? What is the ideal of these things? He reasoned that anything that exists must come from

² Though the Greek philosophers may have had profound insights into the nature of the cosmos that concurred with a monotheistic worldview, they never spoke declaring, "Thus says the Lord."

something else.³ He believed that an ideal form precedes the physical forms. But how do you get from the ideal form to the actual form? How does one get to the beauty and goodness of the cosmos from an abstract, ideal model? Plato answered, the Craftsman.

He also argued that perfect, absolute beauty and goodness must exist for all other beauty and goodness to exist. This ultimate beauty and goodness is like God, the highest beauty and good, the model of perfection.

Plato saw design in the world. In fact, he didn't see any other options. "That a world as beautiful as ours might be the effect of an unintelligent cause is a possibility that does not so much as cross Plato's mind."⁴ Some modern minds may find it effortless to imagine our world forming as just a lucky draw of the cards. But others are forced to admit that the real world does not look random. Dawkins famously remarked that scientists have to consciously avoid concluding that biological structures are intelligently designed even though it appears they were.⁵ Modern biologists may hear the structure of the DNA molecule shouting "design" but they must cover their ears. Plato was under no compulsion. He was under no intellectual pressure to deny God. He saw design in nature and made the simple logical step to conclude that it had a designer. Plato also had no

³ "In *The Laws* (Book X), Plato posited that all movement in the world and the *Cosmos* was "imparted motion". This required a "self-originated motion" to set it in motion and to maintain it. In *Timaeus*, Plato posited a "demiurge" of supreme wisdom and intelligence as the creator of the *Cosmos*." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmological_argument#:~:text=In%20The%20Laws%20\(Book%20X,the%20creator%20of%20the%20Cosmos.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmological_argument#:~:text=In%20The%20Laws%20(Book%20X,the%20creator%20of%20the%20Cosmos.)

⁴ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/>.

⁵ "Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose..." Dawkins, R., *The Blind Watchmaker*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, USA, p. 1, 1986.

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religious police forcing him to believe in God. He was free to propose an atheistic theory but his reasoning would not go there.

Aristotle's Unmoved Mover

Taking up the philosophic task from his mentor, Aristotle put forward his famous Unmoved Mover theory. Astutely observing the complex motion of bodies in space and time, Aristotle offered his own version of a cause and effect argument pointing to the existence of a Creator. Everything that moves (the effect) was put in motion by something else (the cause). For example, billiard balls bounce around a table because of an earlier cause. The first cause is someone with a pool stick, winding back and striking the cue ball with careful aim.

How far back does the chain reaction go? Has it been going on forever? Is the Unmoved Mover like the guy with the pool stick who takes the first shot? Aristotle did not prefer the model of a finite past.

Let this conclude what we have to say in support of our contention that there never was a time when there was not motion, and never will be a time when there will not be motion.⁶

Consider the billiard ball example. Aristotle envisioned the Unmoved Mover like the pool player. His feet are firmly anchored to the ground. He is unmoved as he puts the pool balls into motion with a strike. The first Mover, he sometimes called God (*Theos*) or divine (*theios*), unlike all the subsequent moving objects, never moved itself. So the Unmoved Mover (or Movers) should not be thought of as someone starting the universe at the beginning, but forever acting upon the physical world. Thus, the Unmoved Mover.

⁶ <https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/98/physics/1671/book-8/>.

The Stoics

Some of our old Greek friends followed the school of thought called Stoicism. Perhaps a little like Mr. Spock in the *Star Trek* movies, they thought that excessive emotions like passion, fear and anger indicated something was wrong in their thinking and not a mark of a mature human being. The Stoics believed in a supreme force that interacted with the physical world. This force was probably not generally conceived as a unique person, but without being able to interview a Stoic from the 2nd century BC, we cannot say for sure to what degree their thought resembled the Jewish monotheistic view of God. In any case, the Stoics at least had in mind something like the Ultimate Principle, the Logos, order and design. In this sense they had some idea of teleology in the structure of the cosmos.

Jesus of Nazareth (0-33 AD)

Certain overriding themes stand out in the biography of Jesus of Nazareth. He was raised among the children of Abraham. He was not a member of the ruling elite but a representative of the general masses. His father is recorded as a skilled craftsman (*tecno*) and Jesus would likely have been expected to carry on the family craft. His hometown of Nazareth in northern Judea was not a highly respected town. While Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a few miles away some of his key future followers were learning to operate simple fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee. In modern terms, Jesus lived with and represented blue collar folks, at least for most of his life. Later he would confound the wisest and most highly educated among the Jewish Sanhedrin and attract followers from all levels of society, from the poorest beggars to the most sophisticated teachers.

As a one of the children of Abraham, Jesus had been raised with the Torah's view of YHWH, the creator God. This was a strict monotheism. God is one. In addition to the Law he had the prophets. Like his countrymen, he grew up steeped in the prophetic tradition and

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knew that fulfilled prophecy about future events was the sign that confirmed a prophet's status as speaking on behalf of God.⁷ A false prophet was known by incorrectly forecasting future events. The penalty for false prophecy was severe...death by stoning.

Jesus must have known about the ancient Messianic expectations. The book of Daniel prophesied that a kingly leader would arise someday. Isaiah prophesied six hundred years before Jesus' birth that a Messianic figure would arise.⁸ How could Jesus of Nazareth not be aware of these key passages of the holy book? Would he not also have been familiar with the popular expectations that a Messianic figure in the line of the ancient King David would arise and victoriously drive out the Roman Imperial rulers? Revolution was heavy in the air and Jesus breathed it for three decades.

During Jesus' lifetime the Jerusalem temple still stood majestically. For devout believers, the awe-inspiring and massive temple complex at the heart of the nation was a sign of the existence and presence of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. During Jesus' lifetime God's existence was universally accepted. The temple, the priests, the sacrifices, the Torah and prophets, the Sabbath and the holy festivals constantly reinforced their belief in God. Common people and religious leaders both could view these things as evidence for the existence of the God of Israel.

As a youth, Jesus began acting a bit oddly. Was his behavior no more than normal youthful independence? During the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the twelve year old boy Jesus—hardly an adolescent much less a mature man—left his parents (potentially a dishonor to them)

⁷ See Isaiah 42.

⁸ The Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in the 1940s confirm the reliability of the Isaiah text by comparing the 2000 year old Isaiah text to other lines of Isaiah copied and transmitted through the past 3000 years.

and lingered in the temple dialoguing with the white-bearded religious experts. That's when it became clear that if nothing else, this Jesus of Nazareth was at least a prodigy. Jesus must have been an expert in the Torah to both answer their questions and ask his own. He considered the Torah a very special book of truth. He respected the Torah. Otherwise the religious leaders would have strongly rebuked him.

Jesus' influence picked up momentum fifteen years later when his cousin John baptized him in the Jordan River. John the Baptist was a strange fellow. He preferred camel skin cloths instead of soft robes. His speech was as abrasive as his camel hides. At the Jordan River he greeted Jesus with a prophetic word, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."⁹ This word reveals both John's belief in God and his conviction that God was using him personally to fulfill an ancient prophecy. John believed that God was using him to fulfill prophecy. He embraced his identity as a vessel chosen by the grace of God. Every day John saw evidence of God's existence as ancient prophecies were fulfilled before his own eyes.

Jesus knew himself perfectly and he knew that God exists. He saw answers to his prayers and he knew the Word of God in his heart. He saw everything in his life working perfectly according to the eternal plan of salvation. How did Jesus come to this abiding knowledge? Was he delusional? Was he simply the product of his 1st century family and friends? Was he a liar? Was he an evil narcissist motivated by gaining power over the masses?

Jesus grew up immersed in the Torah and Prophets. He upturned many traditions and challenged religious powers but he did not attack monotheistic belief or pious living. He did the opposite. He raised the moral bar impossibly high. He called the religious leaders hypocrites for performing ritual prayer before people for their praise. He exposed

⁹ John 1:29.

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their phoniness. Jesus instructed his followers to go into a solitary place and speak with God like a loving father. Was Jesus really a secret atheist? Was he only promoting techniques for stress management and relaxation? Did he secretly believe that prayer bounces off the walls? No. Jesus was convinced of his unique relationship with God.

Jesus himself prayed. Jesus regularly went into the wilderness to spend time alone in communion with God. He prayed in front of his disciples. He prayed publicly. He prayed in moments of acute suffering just before his arrest and crucifixion. He prayed even while hanging in mortal agony on the cross. His prayers reflected an unmistakable oneness with God. Jesus called God Father (*Abba...Daddy*). He did not see himself as a channel of impersonal cosmic energy, a universal consciousness or a splinter of the universe. Jesus believed in the existence of a personal God and by all accounts believed he had a unique relationship of Oneness as the God through whom all things came into being. Not stopping there, he warmly invited people to come through him into their own personal relationship with God.

Origen (185-254 AD)

Christian leaders wrote, circulated and studied the twenty-seven books of the New Testament almost one hundred years before Origen's birth.¹⁰ Born into a world where Christianity had already become well-established across the Mediterranean region, Origen had exposure to the message of Jesus from an early age. He was educated according to good Greek and biblical thought and would go on to become one of the most ardent defenders of Christianity against a number of attacks. Ammonius Saccas tutored him in Greek texts, but later, for a time at least, he turned away from Greek philosophy to study the bible

¹⁰ The NT with 27 books as is known today was first formally recognized as completed and closed at the Council of Carthage in 397 AD. However, the NT books were completed and used authoritatively between 45-85 AD.

exclusively.

During Origin's lifetime the powerful skeptic Celsus arose trying to refute the Christian faith. Celsus exhibited strong antipathy for both Jews and Christians, describing them in colorful imagery as, "a swarm of bats, or ants creeping out of their nest, or frogs holding a symposium round a swamp, or worms in conventicle in a corner of the mud".¹¹ A good 2nd century polytheist, he believed in a realm inhabited by God and gods, but this realm behaved quite differently from the way Jews and Christians believed. He considered their rejection of society's traditions and the social order particularly disgusting and a threat to temporal peace and prosperity. One could see how attitudes like his might have driven people into violent persecution against the early church.

An earlier Christian thinker named Justin the Martyr had written what is considered the first apologetic work of the early church, aptly named *The First Apology*. He wanted to persuade the Roman emperor Antonius that Christians brought moral value to society rooted in an ethical and philosophical system that deserved serious consideration and respect. Justin urged the Roman state to cease its persecution of the newly founded movement. It's possible that Celsus was familiar with *The First Apology* and penned his book *The True Word* (Λόγος Ἀληθῆς, *Logos Alēthēs*) in response to Justin's pioneer work. This complex literary and reasoned exchange of thoughts reveals an important shift in the Jesus movement. First, the movement was shifting from Jewishness to Hellenization. No longer did prominent Jewish leaders like Peter and Paul guide the early church using distinctively Jewish texts and traditions. Second, the shift elevated the Gospel from backroom conversations to reasoned debates among highly educated people. They carefully defended or attacked Christianity using some of the same arguments and logic still alive in

¹¹ Glover, T.R. *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, 1909.

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the 21st century.

Celsus attacked the validity of biblical prophecy. He claimed that there was “nothing of importance”¹² in the question of Old Testament Messianic prophecies often debated between Jews and Christians, even likening it to an old proverb of two people fussing about “a donkey’s shadow.” Origen refused to allow Celsus’ dismissive attitude to go unchallenged. He said that Messianic prophecies existed in great number and detail. For example, he cited the prophecies concerning the Messiah’s birthplace, virgin birth, miracles, rapidly spreading message, suffering and condemnation under the Jews, resurrection from the dead and the apostles’ success in taking the Gospel into the world. Origen’s point was that the specificity and complexity of the circumstances in Jesus’ life posed far too great a problem for him to have conducted the greatest fraud of all history.

On similar lines, Celsus proposed a novel explanation for the virgin birth story which modern secularists might find appealing too.

...born in a certain Jewish village, of a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning, and who was turned out of doors by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was convicted of adultery; that after being driven away by her husband, and wandering about for a time, she disgracefully gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate child, who having hired himself out as a servant in Egypt on account of his poverty, and having there acquired some miraculous powers, on which the Egyptians greatly pride themselves, returned to his own country, highly elated on account of them, and by means of these proclaimed

¹² Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Bk 3, Chpt 1.

himself a God.¹³

In response, Origen argues that this account is not convincing because it flies in the face of Isaiah 7:14. This verse says that a young, virgin girl would have a baby. Furthermore, he is impressed that Celsus' story actually works against him, because it still follows the biblical story in the key detail of Joseph not siring Jesus. Origen concludes that the character and teaching of Jesus as recorded are completely inconsistent with this story of lurid adultery and deception. Origen had firm faith in God. His faith was supported by the history of the children of Abraham which culminated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)

As the Christian church spread throughout the Roman Empire, the Jesus movement introduced the world to an entirely new dimension in the question of God's existence. The Greek philosophers relied upon human reason to find the Ultimate Good or Unmoved Mover. Jesus' life, death and resurrection started a revolution. The Good News was anchored in the claim that the Almighty himself had taken the form of a human man. God's existence entered human history. This was radically different from the Greek mythologies. They claimed their plethora of gods and goddesses lived on cloudy mountain-tops or in murky seas. These gods were never the Ultimate. They were always part of the cosmos, regardless how far superior to the ordinary human they might appear in intelligence, skill and strength. The Jesus movement made one of history's most audacious claims. The timeless One entered time. The most exalted One became the most despised. The highest became the lowest. Everything about it seemed absurd and insulting. Yet the claim stuck and spread, like wildfire.

In the first decades and centuries of early church history many brilliant

¹³ Origen, *Contra Celsus*, Bk 1, Chpt 28.

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thinkers sought to articulate and debate this faith throughout the Mediterranean region. Augustine of Hippo stands out as one of the greatest.

Reading Augustine's *Confessions* (397-400 AD) recalls the saying that nothing is new under the sun. Human nature in the 4th century sounds hauntingly like human nature in the 21st. Likewise, some of the same arguments used to reject Christianity in the modern world were used against the faith in Augustine's day. Here's a passage from his pen.

For other than this, that which really is I knew not; and was, as it were through sharpness of wit, persuaded to assent to foolish deceivers, when they asked me, "whence is evil?", "is God bounded by a bodily shape, and has hairs and nails?" "are they to be esteemed righteous who had many wives at once, and did kill men, and sacrifice living creatures?" At which I, in my ignorance, was much troubled, and departing from the truth, seemed to myself to be making towards it; because as yet I knew not that evil was nothing but a privation of good, until at last a thing ceases altogether to be; which how should I see, the sight of whose eyes reached only to bodies, and of my mind to a phantasm? And I knew not God to be a Spirit, not one who hath parts extended in length and breadth, or whose being was bulk; for every bulk is less in a part than in the whole: and if it be infinite, it must be less in such part as is defined by a certain space, than in its infinitude; and so is not wholly everywhere, as Spirit, as God. And what that should be in us, by which we were like to God, and might be rightly said to be after the image of God, I was altogether ignorant.

Augustine was not always a Christian. As a young man he indulged

freely in sexual escapades. He relished a life of sensuality, to the dismay of his believing mother. He wrote in graphic terms,

To Carthage I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves bubbled up all around me. I loved not as yet, yet I loved to love....I searched about for something to love, in love with loving....To love and to be loved was sweet to me, and all the more when I succeeded in enjoying the person I loved. I befouled, therefore, the spring of friendship with the filth of concupiscence, and I dimmed its lustre with the hell of lustfulness....¹⁴

He traveled and partied with people who mocked Christianity. They knew the basic story: God created the world, established the nation of Abraham, sent Jesus and raised him from the dead. But it did not appeal to them. With skillful arguments they persuaded Augustine that the Christian belief system was full of holes. Where did evil come from? Why is there suffering? Did God create evil? If he did, then what kind of God would that be? Did evil come from somewhere else? Why did an almighty and all-good God not stop evil? Is evil objectively real? Perhaps there is ultimately no right or wrong. They attacked the lifestyles of people and the behavior of God portrayed in the Old Testament. Augustine's friends condemned the Torah's descriptions of polygamy, war and animal sacrifices. They taunted believers with a caricature of God's form and substance. Does God have a body with fingernails and toenails? If so, where would such a God exist and what would make him Lord over humanity? If he did not have a body, then what was he composed of, implying that nothing could exist apart from the material world? The alleged problem of evil, the apparent moral inferiority of the Old Testament, and the incorporeal nature of a spiritual being deeply troubled Augustine. He

¹⁴ <https://earlychurchhistory.org/beliefs-2/the-conversion-of-saint-augustine/>.

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was not at all convinced God exists.

On hindsight, Augustine remarked that while he thought these persuasive friends were guiding him to a better and correct view of the world, they were actually steering him farther away. In the above quotation he blames ignorance. He claims he was ignorant that “evil was nothing but a privation of good”, that God was spirit and as such not subject to the laws of time and space and that we were made in the image of God as spiritual beings.

How did Augustine come to the knowledge of God? He answers that he came to faith in God through reason and personal encounter.

Suddenly (when he was in the garden) I heard the voice of a boy or girl chanting over and over again, “pick it up; read it; pick it up, read it.” (Translated from the Latin “Tolle Lege, Tolle Lege” and pronounced “tol-lay lah-jhay”— it means “take up and read.”)

...I quickly returned to the bench...snatched up the apostle’s book...and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes fell: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:13)... I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.”¹⁵

This is a fascinating story. It shows that he experienced both an intensely close encounter with God’s Spirit and he used his innate reasoning. This brought him to a final conclusion. He understood

¹⁵ <https://earlychurchhistory.org/beliefs-2/the-conversion-of-saint-augustine/>.

that reality can only be understood as the product of an infinitely great mind who possesses perfect morals and love.

In one of his books Augustine has an imaginary conversation with a friend called Eviodus. Augustine presents what can be called an ontological argument for God's existence. Ontology refers to something's essential nature. Augustine uses an argument like Plato. He says that the physical world and human minds must have some ultimate ground of being.

Therefore, just as there are true and unchangeable rules of numbers, whose intelligible structure and truth you declared to be unchangeably present in common to all who recognize them, so too are there true and unchangeable rules of wisdom. When asked about a few of them individually just now you replied that they are true and evident, and you granted that they are present and common to be contemplated by all who are able to look upon them. (2.10.2 9.119)

Now you had conceded that if I were to show you something above our minds you would admit it to be God, as long as there were nothing still higher. I accepted your concession and said that it would be sufficient if I were to prove this point. For if there is something more excellent, that instead is God; but if not, then the truth itself is God. Therefore, in either case you won't be able to deny that God exists, and this was the question we agreed to examine and discuss. (if it bothers you that wisdom has a father, according to the hallowed teaching of Christ that we have accepted in faith, remember that we have also accepted in faith that the Wisdom begotten by the eternal father is equal to him; this is not a matter to be investigated now, but

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we must hold it with resolute faith.)

There is a God who truly is, in the highest degree. This we now not only hold free of doubt by faith, I think. We also reach it by a form of understanding that, although as yet very slight, is certain. but it is sufficient for the question we undertook and will enable us to explain other matters that are relevant to it – unless you have some objection to raise.¹⁶

In another place we find Augustine making the case for the logical Law of Non-Contradiction. This is particularly relevant today since some people boldly declare that A and not-A can be equally true.

Please tell me: Will you not admit that someone who is not just is unjust, someone who is not prudent is imprudent, and someone who is not moderate immoderate? Or is there some doubt on this score?)

Augustine argues from reason that if something eternal and unchangeable indeed exists, it must be God. Since human reason can “see” this being with the inner eye of the mind, the being must exist. He confidently proposes to his readers that proof of God’s existence is not only reached through a step of faith alone, but can be supported by a philosophical argument, which appeals to the existence of certain universal ideals (in the Platonic sense). The “God of the Philosophers” is not necessarily the same as the God of the Prophets. What took place in Augustine’s mind and heart to make him shift from Plato’s distant God to faith in the personal God revealed in Messiah Jesus?

¹⁶ Augustine, *On the Free-will*, Book 2, (2.15.39 .153) (2.6.14.54).

Muhammed (570-630 AD)

Traveling south from the Mediterranean cradle of philosophy to the harsh deserts of Arabia, we come to the significant personage of Muhammed. Islamic tradition says that Muhammed could not read or write. Muslims consider it a miracle that he could have produced a book of the literary, theological, scientific and philosophical caliber of the Qur'an.

What made Muhammed believe that God exists? Arabia is a remote and harsh place. But in the 6th century it was not entirely an island. Southern Arabia had large Christian kingdoms. To the west across the Red Sea Ethiopians and Egyptians believed in Messiah Jesus. The North African church had a rich history of thinkers and leaders. Dozens of Jewish communities were scattered across the Middle East. The ancient Arab economy depended heavily on caravan trade. Caravans connecting them with a colorful mix of oral and literary cultures. Everyone loved hearing good stories around the campfire.

Abraham brought forth two lines of descendants: Ishmael and Isaac. Both sons learned the faith of their father. By the time Muhammed started preaching his message that God is one, Meccans were practicing outright idolatry. Were the Meccans monotheists before they became polytheists? Maybe. We know that the idea of Allah existed in their culture prior to Muhammed. Muhammed's father was named Abdullah (the slave of Allah).

If philosophy was the cornerstone of Greek culture, then poetry was the cornerstone of Arabic culture. Story-tellers and poets won attention and gained honor. They helped shape worldviews. Whatever differences may have existed between Greeks and Arabs, we can take from Muhammed's own testimony that he did not come to the belief in God through a philosophical journey but through something of a personal experience. He claimed the angel Gabriel visited him, sent by Allah with the message of the Qur'an. Muhammed took this as a

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supernatural event, albeit one that troubled him greatly. Some of the verses of the Qur'an suggest that Muhammed believed he also had a vision of Allah himself.¹⁷

Reading the Qur'an reveals that Muhammed, however much or little he knew about the God of the Old and New Testament, settled on a very strict monotheism that rejected the incarnation. In what appears to have been an attempt to woo both Jewish and Christian followers, he rejected the divinity of Jesus (like a Jew) while elevating him to a unique position of unequalled holiness and honor (like a Christian). This middle-of-the-fence strategy did not produce many conversions from either side. Islam then entered phase two, an extended period of military and economic conquest that spread rapidly across North Africa, into Spain and to the borders of France. This pattern of advance has existed for a long time. In modern times many Muslims simply take God's existence as a presupposition, but now and again some Muslim thinkers have sought to offer thoughtful arguments for theism.

Al-Ghazali (1058-1111)

Taking up the challenge of presenting an argument for theism, the Muslim theologian al-Ghazali offered the *Kalam* argument. Unsatisfied with Aristotle's eternal universe model, some thinkers in the Middle Ages sought to argue for a finite universe. Anyone familiar with the book of Genesis knows that traditional Jews and Christians accept a finite universe. Al-Ghazali's argument has two parts. His first point is that everything that has a beginning has a cause. Secondly he argued that the universe must have a beginning (this is centuries before modern astrophysics discoveries). If the universe has a beginning and everything that begins has a cause, then the universe has a cause. Al-Ghazali, a devout Muslim, believed this First Cause was Allah of the

¹⁷ See Qur'an 53:1-18, 81:15-29.

Qur'an. Humanity would need to wait nearly a thousand years before astrophysicists equipped with telescopes and Einstein's theory of relativity could use science to show that the universe had a beginning. Modern science supports the *Kalam* argument with the Big Bang cosmology.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

Thomas Aquinas started life in a medieval castle perched atop an Italian hill. The youngest son of a traditional Roman Catholic family, he became one of the world's most notable and influential Christian philosophers and theologians. His status in Western history stands out prominently like his childhood home on the hilltop. The sheer volume of Aquinas' writings attest to his driving ambition to better understand and defend the Christian faith.

How would this medieval Italian scholar come to believe in the existence of God? In 13th century Europe, the Roman Catholic Church superintended a culture of institutional theism that pervaded all areas of life. From 1096-1291 eight Crusades stormed out of Europe against the southern and eastern advances of Islamic armies. They sought to curb Islamic advances on the borders of Europe and reclaim Jerusalem for the sake of Christian pilgrimages. Medieval Roman Catholicism had devolved into excessive extra-biblical practices of prayer to and for the dead, use of religious relics for spiritual blessing and ritual visits to holy places. Superstitious *Folk Christianity* dominated the majority of Europeans. Today it still affects many people across the world. The average person is often more interested in finding immediate solutions to daily problems rather than solving the question of God's existence.

During Aquinas' lifetime European civilization experienced a renaissance of Aristotelian thought, thanks to the availability of new Latin translations of the Greek classics. Aquinas soaked up Aristotle's thought and grafted his arguments into his own reasoning about the

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existence of God. Eventually he devised his *Five Ways* arguments, still often cited today. Here are the Five Ways in short form.

1. Straight from the thought of Aristotle, this way observes that everything in motion has a mover. This chain of motion could not carry on without the presence of an Unmoved Mover. The idea here is that the motions of several pieces, like gears in a watch, require a motor. There must be some energy source that powers all these individual powerless parts, or at least start the motion which could release more power for movement. Aristotle envisioned an eternal universe with an Unmoved Mover exerting influence upon it. Writing from a biblical perspective, Aquinas parts ways from Aristotle and poses a finite universe.

2. Every effect has a cause. Everything that has a beginning has a beginner. This First Cause for Aquinas does not necessarily mean first in time, but first in rank. Just as individual objects could not move on their own without something starting their motion, they also needed something to bring them into existence. Something has to create what exists. Perhaps everything simply exists, but then it would all have to be in motion infinitely past. Aquinas said that was inconceivable. He argued that the supreme cause of all things must be the Creator God.

3. We have looked at motion and cause, now we consider existence. Philosophers recognize two kinds of existence, contingent and necessary. If something could exist or not exist, it is considered contingent. Its existence depends on something else. When we call something “a necessary being” we mean that it cannot not exist. We mean that it *must* exist, its existence is necessary. Aquinas supposes that if everything in the universe is contingent (that it could have not existed), everything would have ceased to exist long ago or infinitely long ago. But we see that things do exist, so there must be something that exists which is necessary. On the other hand, if what we see in the physical universe exists necessarily, it either got this property from

something else or exists independently. Aquinas rejects the notion of an infinite past. As some said, *infinitum actu non datur* (there is no actual infinity).¹⁸ He says that an infinite chain of necessary beings could not exist in the past. If not, then necessary beings or a necessary being must exist outside of time, uncaused by anything else. We typically call this Necessary (self-existing) Being, God.

4. The Fourth Way argument echoes Plato's argument of supreme goodness and beauty. Aquinas observes how certain qualities of human goodness, honor, uprightness and other virtues come in degrees. If one can be good and another person better, can we not suppose that the supreme good exists? The supreme good above which nothing else could exist is the person we call God.

5. Design argument. Working backwards from human experience of designing and building, Aquinas reasoned that the ordered universe and the creatures inhabiting it exhibit properties of design. Design requires a designer. Aquinas lived centuries before Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Nevertheless he probably would have disagreed with Darwin. Aquinas thought that the universe needed an intelligent mind to bring it into order. He believed that physical laws lacked the power to organize complex, functioning systems. The orderly universe, at least as much as could be observed in the 13th century, argued strongly if not decisively in his mind for the existence of a supreme Creator.

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

In some ways Pascal stands out as one of the greatest geniuses of the past few centuries. His life also had some interesting paradoxes. He did not attempt to use philosophical arguments to argue for God's existence. He did however use his intellect to write a geometry text as

¹⁸ <https://philosophy.stackexchange.com/questions/65553/does-st-thomas-aquinas-cosmological-argument-from-contingency-assume-that-an-i>.

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a precocious 16-year-old, invented a kind of proto-computer used to make calculations for his father's tax accounting, studied the physical laws of pressure and became a celebrated writer of literature. Alongside these great intellectual achievements he had an intensely private spiritual experience. He chose to honor his experience by writing a special note about it and carrying it in his pocket for all time.

Pascal had much to say about almost everything and many of his ideas were later collected and published as *Pensees* (*Thoughts*). Premature death interrupted his amazing life and left his *Pensees* a fractured, incomplete work. In the writings that remain he expresses some powerful arguments for the God of Abraham and Jesus. Here he puts particular emphasis on evidences for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The prophecies, the very miracles and proofs of our religion, are not of such a nature that they can be said to be absolutely convincing. But they are also of such a kind that it cannot be said that it is unreasonable to believe them. Thus there is both evidence and obscurity to enlighten some and confuse others. But the evidence is such that it surpasses, or at least equals, the evidence to the contrary; so that it is not reason which can determine men not to follow it, and thus it can only be lust or malice of heart. And by this means there is sufficient evidence to condemn, and insufficient to convince; so that it appears in those who follow it, that it is grace, and not reason, which makes them follow it; and in those who shun it, that it is lust, not reason, which makes them shun it.¹⁹

These pithy remarks reveal that Pascal gave very serious thought to the

¹⁹ Pascal, *Pensees*, p.563.

problem of uncertainty. Is the evidence for God's existence inadequate to convince someone? Is the question of God's existence completely beyond the reach of reason? He answers that there is enough evidence (how much evidence is not clear, maybe it is "just enough") for God's existence so that no one can justify their atheism. But the level of evidence is not quite compelling in itself alone to conquer reason. So the person who comes to faith in God must have God's help (grace), while the one who rejects faith in God is rebelling for moral not rationale reasons.

Isaac Newton (1643-1727)

Perhaps it is unfair to rank the great intellectual leaders of past centuries, but it is hard not to see Sir Isaac Newton as a stand-out in every way. Modern science has Einstein's strange theory of relativity and the advent of quantum physics, but Newtonian physics is still routinely used to make a vast array of calculations in daily life. Furthermore, Newton's book *Principia Mathematica* established the foundation for calculus. Newton's mathematical system makes modern science and engineering possible. How great a debt modern technology owes Newton!

Another gift Newton gave us was a simple summary of the scientific method. As you look through this method you can imagine how it is also useful for analyzing metaphysical questions as well.

- (1) we are to admit no more causes of natural things such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearances, (2) the same natural effects must be assigned to the same causes, (3) qualities of bodies are to be esteemed as universal, and (4) propositions deduced from observation of phenomena should be viewed as accurate until other phenomena contradict

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them.²⁰

We can hardly exaggerate Newton's brilliant mind. He calculated the orbits of planets and made firm and undisputed descriptions of our physical world. For the most part his energies turned toward physics and math rather than biology. Some modern atheists balk at the suggestion that great scientists can believe in God. They dismiss historical examples of believers like Newton because he did not have the benefit of living after Darwin. They think that the Theory of Evolution might have made him an atheist. This is a mistake. Newton had faith in God because he was convinced that the universe gave evidence of God's existence. He wrote, "This most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being."²¹ Simply put, anyone who thoughtfully peers into the nighttime sky will be struck by the fact that it exhibits extraordinary order and predictability rather than randomness and chaos. Why should this be so? It is a question as fundamental as why anything exists at all. The cosmos that Newton observed and mathematically analyzed is the same one we still see today. Its form and function still call for an explanation outside of itself. Enter the world of metaphysics.

Would Isaac Newton be an atheist in the 21st century? What is different today from the world where he lived? The raw substance of the cosmos is the same today as the year 1690. Modern scientists know more than Newton did about particle physics, gravitational waves, the immensity of the universe and the relativity of space and time. Modern society has countless amazing new technologies ranging from spacecraft to electric toothbrushes. But would any of this undermine Newton's basic argument that the extraordinary

²⁰ <http://scienceworld.wolfram.com/biography/Newton.html>.

²¹ Newton, Isaac, *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, 1687.

mathematical precision and order in the cosmos require an extraordinary explanation?

Imagine Newton chatting with an Oxford physicist and biologist. The modern scientists say to him, “Now Sir Newton, we can explain how things work. Can’t you see that science shows there is no need for God?”

Newton smiles and answers, “I see your point. Yes...sub-atomic systems and cellular DNA are far more beautiful and complex than anything in my wildest imagination. Why can’t you understand that these elegant arrangements could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being?”

Has modern man evolved in his thinking to a more advanced and correct position of unbelief? This is an insult to Newton. Was Newton a shallow thinker? Did he believe in God because it was the social fashion? What evidence do modern scientists have that Newton did not?

Perhaps some scientists are shallow thinkers. They do not want to think about the big questions. Maybe some are swayed by peer pressure. Perhaps some people call themselves atheists or deists because they want to be popular. They want people to like them. They do not want to search for the truth because it is uncomfortable. Isaac Newton was not one of these people. He believed in God because it made the most sense to him and he did not care what other people thought about him.

G.W.F. Leibniz (1646-1716)

“Why is there something rather than nothing?” Leibniz asks, sparking a cascade of other questions we still ask. Why is there *something* which can ask “why”? Why does the universe working through humans observe itself, as though the universe has learned to take a selfie? Is it possible to ever truly conceive of absolute nothing? If we could

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conceive of absolute nothing wouldn't our conception of it make it something? Wouldn't nothing become something in our mind? An expert in mathematics and philosophy, Leibniz succeeded in catalyzing deeper thought about the ultimate nature of being.

In the argument of Sufficient Reason, Leibniz starts with the assumption that nothing exists without a reason. He cannot find in the universe itself a good reason for why it exists. It does not explain itself. It is contingent, not necessary. Therefore the Sufficient Reason must exist outside the universe. The conclusion is that the Sufficient Reason is a metaphysically necessary being. There is a subtle difference here between Leibniz and Aquinas. The idea of a Sufficient Reason goes deeper than a cause. It seems Leibniz speaks of reason to mean more than a force or motion that activates something else. Reason points out purpose. The purpose of the universe cannot be found in itself, whereas a necessary being can have its own self-contained purpose.

William Paley (1743-1805)

With thoughts of rural England, William Paley opens his book *Natural Theology* with an unforgettable scene reminiscent of a fictional hobbit starting a great adventure. "In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone..." Paley's imagined walker then stumbles upon a timepiece (relatively modern technology of the time) and ponders its origin. Has it always been there in the weeds? Did it come into existence by the same unguided processes as the rock? Did it come from earlier watches that somehow replicated themselves? We can dismantle the watch into the smaller components of springs, gears, posts, hands and glass face. Each piece fits precisely to the other in such a way that removing one will damage or disable the entire assembly. How did these individual parts become fitted together so perfectly to achieve the desired goal of displaying the precise time of day? He writes, "there must have existed, at some time, and at some

place or another, an artificer or artificers, who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer.”²²

How does Paley distinguish between something formed naturally without the aid of a designer, like his stone in the heath, and the lost watch unexpectedly discovered? The difference is in mathematical probabilities and the limits of the capacity of physical processes. He says, “For every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation.”²³ He means that mathematically speaking, it is impossible to calculate the degree of complexity which we discover in natural systems like living creatures surpasses the degree of complexity found in a watch. We intuitively know that a watch, with its gears, springs, casing and glass face could not come into existence without the intervention of an intelligent mind. Therefore we can further reason that organisms constructed with functional complexity many orders of magnitude higher than a watch could not be the product of unintelligent, natural processes. The watch cries out in witness for a watchmaker. Paley believed that in the same way creation cries out in witness for a Creator.

Immanuel Kant ((1724–1804)

Considered one of the intellectual rock stars of the Enlightenment, German philosopher Immanuel Kant penned many works including *Critique of Judgment*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, and *Critique of Pure Reason*. As the titles of these major works indicate, Kant was not entirely confident in the power of human intellect in itself to grasp the nature of reality. Influenced by Hume’s skepticism, Kant dove into an attempt to generate a satisfactory epistemology that placed high value

²² Paley, William, *Natural Theology*, 1802.

²³ Ibid.

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on human subjectivism. Not opposed to scientific study, Kant nevertheless made the curious remark that, “Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects . . . more progress may be made if we assume the contrary hypothesis that the objects of thought must conform to our knowledge.”²⁴

Kant’s philosophy couldn’t tolerate a high degree of confidence in matters of objective senses and science. He did not allow room for the use of physical evidence and logical arguments in matters of metaphysical questions of the existence of God and a spiritual realm. He quipped, “I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.” Thus Kant could be considered one of the early proponents of the Science versus Faith war. He moved the questions of God’s existence out of the realm of reasonable inquiry (including unbiased historical studies of the biblical texts) and into the mystical realm of “faith contrary to the evidence.” Though he always maintained a modicum of Protestant Pietism from his early childhood, Kant placed humanity squarely at the center of his philosophical position. Kant thought that whether God existed or not, it had little practical importance for daily life. For him the important things of life such as knowing, being and living morally must be resolved by the individual deep within his or her own self.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

Living as a refined European man of letters at the same time that American pioneers like Davy Crockett were fighting bears in the wilderness, Soren Kierkegaard had the luxury of sinking ever deeper into a life of philosophical introspection. Maybe Kierkegaard’s effete culture contributed to his drifting into his brand of existentialism. His philosophy became famous for saying that the Christian life starts with a blind leap of faith. He wrote,

²⁴<https://www.informationphilosopher.com/solutions/philosophers/kant/preface.html>

When someone is to leap he must certainly do it alone
and also be alone in properly understanding that it is
an impossibility. ... the leap is the decision.²⁵

Would he have put more importance on gathering facts when making
a decision if he had ever faced a bear on a narrow mountain pass?

Kierkegaard belonged to a strong Danish national Lutheran church. He expressed great interest in religious subjects. As he aged his writing shifted from philosophy to religion. In the early 19th century, decades before Darwin's theory of evolution, many European intellectuals had already begun to express skepticism about spiritual realities. The Enlightenment elevated human reason from a secondary position to equality with divine revelation, and then finally to superiority. The pure rationalists would eventually call the concept of divine revelation absurd. Their philosophical rationalism and materialism took hold among the intellectual class long before Darwin's theory offered a purely natural explanation for biological origins. Enlightenment thinking predated the Theory of Evolution and modern cosmology. Enlightenment deists, atheists and skeptics did not reject God because of scientific discoveries. Rather, they took as fact certain presuppositions about the external universe and the internal mind.

A sensitive young man (and perhaps highly idealistic), Kierkegaard lived in an age of perfunctory state church life, rapid cultural change, intellectual questioning and scientific advance. In the face of these circumstances he became deeply introspective about the meaning of the Christian faith. Perceiving that all humans seem to exhibit an intensely private core of consciousness, he chose to explore that inner, existential space of human thought and emotion to discover the

²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments, Vol I*. Translated by Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong. Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 96, 130–13.

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ground of God's interaction with humanity. This put him at odds with the established church which emphasized the observance of external religious rites and rituals. The subjective *existentializing* of the Christian faith also diminished the role of physical evidence in deciding to believe in God. The objective truthfulness of the bible became less an issue than simply believing. The "leap of faith" has more or less become a synonym for "blind faith" which means little more than believing something in the complete absence of or worse yet contrary to the evidence. This definition gives fodder to the 21st century atheist and skeptic who insists that believing in God is no better supported by scientific evidence than believing in the Easter Bunny. Kierkegaardian thinking might explain how a college student could quip, "I believe in mermaids. I don't care if I have no evidence. I believe because I want to." Like Karl Barth, the 20th century existentialist theologian popular in liberal seminaries, Kierkegaard helped set the foundation for new ways to define religious and philosophical terms. Classical Christian terminology would come to mean different things to different people. The subjective overtook the objective. The stage was thus set for the emergence of postmodern deconstructionism which would further erode all ideas of objective truth and create an intellectual atmosphere where people could say without blushing, "this is *my* truth."

Did Kierkegaard believe that an objectively real God exists? If we could sit down with him over a Danish roll and cup of coffee perhaps an honest conversation would reveal what he really thought. Because he believed that the hidden and inaccessible interior world of the human soul was the primary or perhaps the exclusive field of God's interpersonal activity with humans, Kierkegaard thought that it was probably fruitless to speak of proving God's existence. Yes, he believed in a God of some sort, but who and why? Was his belief grounded in a purely existential intuition? Was it an emotional impulse? Is it the path of wisdom to take a leap of faith with no evidence?

Charles Darwin (1809-1882)

By now it should be evident that the ancient and thoughtful arguments for God's existence never exclusively relied on the difficulty of explaining the origin of living organisms. Sometimes modern proponents for atheism give the impression that theism's last stronghold was found in biological design arguments like William Paley's. This is a shallow view of history. Dawkins once remarked that Darwin's theory of evolution finally made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.²⁶ But for someone like Newton or Aquinas who looks at the bigger picture of ultimate contingency and necessity, Darwinism addresses only a minor part of their theistic arguments and not the primary supports. In light of these theists' powerful cosmological and ontological arguments, a person would need powerful evidence to the contrary to achieve intellectual fulfillment as an atheist. Nevertheless, in popular culture, Dawkins is an example of how the theory of evolution is used time and again to prove that God is either irrelevant or non-existent.

Like many intellectuals of the 19th century Charles Darwin was a product of Enlightenment thinking which elevated human reason above or completely to the exclusion of divine revelation. His academic resume included theological study for a position in the church. Was the young Darwin a pious Christian believer? Probably not. Religious studies were often considered a sign of culture, not true faith. For hundreds of years England has seen a tension between formal religionists and devout believers. John Bunyan gives unforgettable testimony to this in his allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*. The main character named Christian must undertake an arduous pilgrimage to reach the Celestial City while hypocritical church folk and religionists continually assail his faith. How many 19th century English clergy could give personal evidence of what is known in biblical

²⁶ Dawkins, R., *The Blind Watchmaker*. New York: Norton, 1986, p 6.

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vernacular as the *new birth*? Darwin gives no indication of such a transformative event in his youth and seems to have launched his career as a gentleman naturalist with a thoroughly Enlightenment worldview. Perhaps he was tolerant of deism but was predisposed against belief in a personal God.²⁷

Charles Darwin was not the first in his family line to toy with evolutionary thinking. His grandfather Erasmus Darwin held proto-evolutionary views a generation earlier. Charles Darwin's own evolution epiphany came during his voyage to the Galapagos Islands on the HMS Beagle. He studied various species of finches which used their beaks uniquely adapted for feeding on seeds of different size and hardness. Equipped with a powerful imagination (and grandfather Erasmus' proto-evolutionary thought), Darwin scribbled down his provocative ideas. It was as though Darwin had stumbled upon Paley's watch lost in the heath. Did he think God designed the system? No. He imagined that time and chance could slowly create and assemble the gears and springs according to environmental pressures with no need for an intelligent designer. Unthinking, impersonal Nature itself was the designer, if anything. But nature does not have a mind which thinks ahead toward some future goal. In Darwin's theory there was no teleology and if the whole deck of cards was reshuffled and dealt again, cock roaches could be the creatures sporting expensive watches

²⁷ Curiously, since Darwin's time some of his promoters have worked very hard to cast Darwin in the most favorable light as a God-fearing, almost saintly person, presumably in an attempt to win over the religious crowd to the theory of evolution. For example, one website reports, "Darwin whole-heartedly supported [evangelist] Fegan's work in the village, writing in 1880 or 1881: 'your services have done more for the village in a few months than all our efforts for many years. We have never been able to reclaim a drunkard, but through your services I do not know that there is a drunkard left in the village.'"

<https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/commentary/religion/darwin-and-church>.

and smoking cigars.

When released to the public in 1851, Darwin's *Origin of the Species* gave some people what they considered a fresh—perhaps final and fatal—attack on theism. What impact did the theory of evolution have on Darwin himself? He may have remained something of a deist or theist to the end of his life. Educated in the English upper-class, Darwin probably knew Hume's arguments against the supernatural. Philosophically skeptical of supernaturalism and armed with his new theory of natural selection, Darwin had little reason to expect much from Christian theism. Thus he said,

There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent & omnipotent God would have designedly created the *Ichneumonidae* with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice.²⁸

William Sorley (1855-1935)

A lesser known scholar but still worthy of mention is William Sorley. Working at Cambridge University he put together an argument for God's existence based on the existence of objective moral values. This argument continues to be popular in the 21st century, probably because it appeals to a universal human sense of right and wrong and because it does not involve tedious debates about Darwinian evolution which ultimately may or may not have any relevance to the question of God's existence. Scientific debates require an understanding of events and processes which is far beyond the experience of most folks, but questions of right and wrong, "is-ness" and "ought-ness" deluge us constantly. Should we work hard or lounge around on our sofas with a TV remote in hand? Should we cut in line at the grocery or let others

²⁸ <https://libquotes.com/charles-darwin/quotes/god>.

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go first, even giving up our place in line? What about abortion? Racial justice? Relationships between the sexes? While some moral opinions seem to vary from time to time and culture to culture, all humans recoil from certain behaviors as essentially evil and embrace others as essentially good. If moral awareness is a psychological component of humanity that transcends cultures, does it suggest that there is a moral law that exists objectively? Though he didn't live long enough to see it happen, what would Sorley have said about the Holocaust? Who argues that the Nazi Holocaust was not absolutely evil and that it is not always evil in every culture to put innocent families into gas chambers and ovens? Obviously, the Nazis argued that it wasn't absolutely wrong and went about murdering Jews with apparently no pangs in their consciences. But if genocide is the height of moral evil, who has the authority to make that judgment and who has the right to make it stop even if military force is needed?

Sorley says that modern man is faced with a difficult situation. Today we understand quantum physics, molecular biology, cosmology and medical science better than ever in history yet we cannot easily account for moral absolutes. We cannot use scientific knowledge to explain what is right and wrong or why right and wrong exist. In the game of survival the fastest and strongest lions catch the prey while the slower, weaker ones watch from the sidelines with diminished odds of reproduction. The animal world does not function according to an objective moral good. To the contrary, selflessness and humility, lauded among many human cultures, would quickly extinguish the lion pride (no pun intended). If objective morals exist, they cannot be grounded in nature, because nature has nothing to say about right or wrong. Morality cannot be observed under a microscope or in a test tube. Molecules are not moral-clues. Existence simply *is*. If we try to ground moral values in personal or social preferences, we still wind up with temporal values that change with the passing of people and cultures. I could assert that my grandfather disapproved of divorce.

But once he dies, what anchors me to that moral position? Maybe my mother believes no-fault divorce is perfectly fine and takes more husbands than a Hollywood actress. If morality is not completely subjective, Sorley can find only one explanation, the existence of a perfectly moral God. His eternal changelessness and his universality over all things is the only sufficient ground for changeless morals.

George Washington Carver (1860-1943)

Taking a break from the Oxford and Cambridge aristocratic class, we turn to some other amazing individuals who helped shape the modern world. One of these is George Washington Carver, an African-American agriculturalist who introduced innovative agricultural practices into post-Civil War society so the rapidly growing nation could not only eat nutritionally but put organic resources to work in amazing new ways.

Carver grew up in a time of rapid national growth when the country felt immense pressure to produce food and raw materials for industry. He became famous for his experimentation on the popular Southern crop of peanuts. The National Peanut Board reports,

As the “Father of the Peanut Industry,” George Washington Carver developed more than 300 uses for peanuts, including chili sauce, shampoo, shaving cream and glue, to help save agriculture in the South. His humanitarian efforts were well documented and his innovations were so popular that even Franklin D. Roosevelt, Henry Ford and Thomas Edison were among his many fans.²⁹

To be clear, theists have no monopoly on humanitarianism, but in Carver’s case, there is no debate about his motivation for research,

²⁹ <https://www.nationalpeanutboard.org/more/gw-carver>.

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discovery and service to his fellow person. Carver was not only a theist but a devout Christian. He considered science the realm of God...obviously. How could it be otherwise, since it was his idea in the first place? Carver once remarked,

God is going to reveal to us things He never revealed before if we put our hands in His. No books ever go into my laboratory. The thing I am to do and the way of doing it are revealed to me. I never have to grope for methods. The method is revealed to me the moment I am inspired to create something new. Without God to draw aside the curtain I would be helpless.³⁰

Keep in mind that Carver was not writing as a philosopher but an experimental biologist. He appears unconcerned about the thorny philosophical issues of high-minded German, Scottish and English skeptics and far more interested in a personal and imminent Creator/Sustainer God who is inviting humans to get their hands down into the dirt together with him. Carver's God is the one who dug around in the dirt in the Garden of Eden, planting, arranging, prospering, forming and enjoying his labor.

Did Carver have an argument for God's existence? He gives insight in a letter he wrote to a friend in 1927.

... Then, we can walk and talk with Jesus momentarily, because we will be attuned to His will and wishes, thus making the Creation story of the world non-debatable as to its reality.

God, my beloved friend, is infinite, the highest

³⁰https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1495762.George_Washington_Carver.

embodiment of love. We are finite, surrounded and often filled with hate. We can only understand the infinite as we lose the finite and take on the infinite.

My dear friend, my friendship to you cannot possibly mean what yours does to me. I talk to God through you, you help me to see God through another angle ...

As we will see in the upcoming sketch on Anthony Flew, some atheists pose the question, “What would have to occur or to have occurred to constitute for you a disproof of the love of, or of the existence of, God?”³¹ One can imagine Carver responding, “Had Jesus never lived, I would take that as a disproof of God.” For Carver, the figure of Jesus Christ, both as presented in the Gospel message and in the living experience of his followers provided “non-debatable” evidence of God’s reality.

Marie Curie, (born Maria Skłodowska) (1867-1934)

Living in an age of exciting discoveries in fundamental science which would lay the foundation for the great technological breakthroughs of the 20th centuries, Marie Curie, working alongside her physicist husband Pierre Curie, would go on to win two Nobel Prizes for her research in the field of radioactivity and identification of radium and polonium. Her unrivaled success in the fields of physics and chemistry do not give her an authoritative answer about the question of God’s existence, but they do rank her as one of the world’s top thinkers.

What did this woman, diminutive in stature but gigantic in intellect, have to say about the God question? The answer is a bit ambiguous. A few years before her death she remarked, “Pierre belonged to no

³¹ https://philosophynow.org/issues/29/Theology_and_Falsification_A_Golden_Jubilee_Celebration.

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religion and I did not practice any.”³² Unfortunately this comment gives little information to work with. Was she contrasting her belief system with her husband Pierre’s? Was she saying she belonged to a religion but did not practice it whereas he had no such attachment? Failing to practice one’s religious background (in her case Roman Catholicism) does not an atheist make.

Curie is often quoted as saying, “Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.”³³ This statement taken in itself also does not tilt the scale in favor of atheism. To the contrary, it can easily be employed by the Christian theist to support the notion that all things have a purpose and ultimately will work out for enduring good...even death, therefore the true believer will fear nothing.³⁴ The New Testament point of view seems to be quite in accord with Marie Curie. Was she a deist, agnostic or atheist? Did she believe in a transcendent, powerful creator existing outside the material realm? With such little information we have to be agnostic about Curie’s deepest held beliefs.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)

One of the more flamboyant representatives of 20th century atheists, Bertrand Russell vigorously defended Darwinism as a knock-down argument for a purely material universe. Russell was born during a period of great optimism about the human race, not many years after Darwin released his *Origin of the Species*. Following the American Civil War, the end of slavery and the advent of new technologies, industrialization moved full speed ahead in the West. Russell was born

³² <https://ffrf.org/ftod-cr/item/14637-marie-curie>.

³³ <https://openlysecular.org/freethinker/marie-curie/>.

³⁴ “There is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment” (1 Jn 4:18). Jesus also said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (Jn 8:32).

in the era of horse and buggy and died in the days astronauts kicked up moon dust. Nineteenth century optimism would meet significant challenges in WW1, the War to End all Wars. Contrary to its hopeful name the War to End all Wars did not, but set the stage for a much more horrific war that unleashed modern weapons culminating in the atomic desolation of two Japanese cities.

Living through two devastating World Wars would make any thinking man wonder what had gone wrong with human nature. Russell said, “The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts.”³⁵ His comment deserves consideration. Did he count himself among the fanatics or the wise, after all, he seems quite certain of himself here.

A well-known story recounts that someone asked Russell what he might say to God if they ever met. Russell replied, “Not enough evidence God! Not enough evidence.” Judging Russell by his own standards we can ask, was his emphatic response the humble posture of a learner or the demands of a fanatic? Rather than considering the possibility that he had missed something, overlooked some piece of data or left some stone unturned, Russell boasted that he would blurt out to the greatest Intellect of all possible worlds, “I know better than you what I needed to justify my believing in you. If I have failed to be convinced, it is you who have failed, not me.” Hmm, who is the fool and who is the wise in this interesting hypothetical episode? Perhaps in the end it was not hypothetical.

Personalities like Russell present a particular set of difficulties. With brazen pronouncements of “Not enough evidence!” they become the very thing they disdain in other dogmatic assertions. For example, he

³⁵ <https://www.openculture.com/2016/06/bertrand-russell-the-problem-with-the-world-is-that-fools-fanatics-are-so-certain-of-themselves.html>.

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said, “the trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt.”³⁶ If cocksureness indicates stupidity, where does that place Russell? An outsider can look at these attitudes and start wondering if he was not really speaking tongue in cheek, toying with everyone just to be entertaining and provocative. If he was in earnest, we are left wondering how he could be blind to such obvious contradictions in his own life.

Was Russell correct that there isn't enough evidence to warrant belief in God? Did 20th century men and women have enough evidence for belief in God? Asked another way, did they have enough evidence for rejecting belief in God?

What did Russell think about the origin of the universe? Perhaps more than any other question, this one nags at the thoughtful person and hints (if not declares) at the existence of a non-temporal, creative Mind. Russell considered this possibility and said,

Are we to infer from this that the world was made by a Creator? Certainly not, if we are to adhere to the canons of valid scientific inference. There is no reason whatever why the universe should not have begun spontaneously, except that it seems odd that it should do so; but there is no law of nature to the effect that things which seem odd to us must not happen. To infer a Creator is to infer a cause, and causal inferences are only admissible in science when they proceed from observed causal laws. Creation out of nothing is an occurrence which has not been observed. There is, therefore, no better reason to suppose that the world

³⁶ <https://philosiblog.com/2011/12/08/the-trouble-with-the-world-is-that-the-stupid-are-cocksure-and-the-intelligent-are-full-of-doubt/>.

was caused by a Creator than to suppose that it was uncaused; either equally contradicts the causal laws that we can observe.³⁷

We quickly encounter several problems here (aside from the possibility of Russell's own cocksureness). First, what grounds does he have for asserting that we have no reason to doubt that the universe began spontaneously, like a rabbit magically popping out of a magician's hat? We have several reasons to doubt spontaneous generation, the chief being that we *never* observe anything popping into being spontaneously. House flies do not spontaneously pop into being out of mud. Fully formed brains do not pop into being in empty space. Rabbits do not jump out of empty black hats. He is simply making an empty assertion contrary to all observed science.

Second, he uses the very odd word "odd" to describe how we might think about something spontaneously coming into existence. And not just any old something (as though size should matter when it comes to things popping into existence from nothing), but he is referring to the whole universe, the same one that boggles the mind in its glory. It does not strike us as simply *odd*, in the way one might refer to the neighbor's *odd* habit of leaving up his Christmas tree up all year round. It strikes us as *impossible*. A universe coming into existence spontaneously from absolutely nothing (not even some kind of pure primeval field of bubbling quantum energy) does not seem odd. It is not possible. It cannot happen. This is not a problem resolved by a stroke of the pen and a bad (or misleadingly clever) choice of words that soften the blow.

Third, Russell falls upon his own sword when he writes that we have never observed a mind create something out of nothing, so we have

³⁷ "Science and Religion" (1931) in *Bertrand Russell on God and Religion* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1986), p. 177-78.

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no reason to suppose that it is a better explanation of the universe than the spontaneous existence of the universe. Why did Russell not just apply this standard of observation to spontaneous existence? We have *never* observed spontaneous existence from nothing, so really the best Russell could say according to his own logic—if he were in fact humble and not dogmatic—is that our existence defies all explanation based on direct observations and by all rights should be impossible, yet here we are. So flip a coin, either a Creator did it or it simply happened. The possibility that a creative Mind made the universe from something is no less possible than the universe popping into existence from nothing.

But there is a deeper problem for Russell. These two options are *not* equally plausible? Why? The Judeo-Christian view says the universe did not come into existence from perfect *nothing*, but rather it came into existence from no prior time, space and matter under the guidance of an all-wise Mind. “In the beginning God...” What we do observe every day are intelligent minds bringing abstract ideas into concrete form. An Egyptian architect conjured up the image of the Great Pyramid in his mind (no brain surgeon could have teased out the image) and then builders brought it into physical existence. Therefore, Russell’s logic breaks down. This is not a choice between two equally unobserved and impossible explanations of the existence of the universe. According to logic, random spontaneous existence out of nothing is irrational. Creation of something new by a preexistent mind is not.

There is another reason why these options are not equally plausible. All observed physical events have had a cause, the big bang was a physical event, therefore the big bang likely had a cause. A conceptual analysis of this cause along the lines of the Kalam cosmological argument reveals it to be an immaterial, incredibly powerful mind. The spontaneous generation option doesn’t have comparable supporting arguments, so it is the least likely of the two.

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963)

Down at the Eagle and Child pub (the Bird and the Baby as it is affectionately called by locals), nestled amongst the honey-colored academic cloisters of Oxford, C.S. Lewis could often be found sipping a pint and vigorously debating almost any subject with his Inklings friends. They canvassed every subject imaginable, slipping from one profound thought to another with ease, as might be expected of Oxford dons. The Eagle and the Child pub was their tinkerer's workshop, where they brought forth treasures of Middle Earth and Narnia. It's also where Lewis and Tolkien honed and sharpened one another in a friendship spanning decades. Lewis never stopped eagerly searching and debating, but his worldview shifted radically across the years. Lewis tells his poignant and sometimes tragic story in *Surprised by Joy*. Pain entered his idyllic childhood world through the death of his mother. He found comfort in the close, life-long friendship with his only brother. Lewis suffered injury in WW1 and watched his fellow humans inflict horrors upon one another. After the war he became a successful scholar, first at Oxford and later at Cambridge.

William T. Kirkpatrick, affectionately known as "The Knock", tutored Lewis during his youth. A strong and fierce intellectual, he challenged Lewis to think critically and examine his beliefs with ruthless scrutiny. Recalling Kirkpatrick's atheism Lewis wrote,

Having said that he was an Atheist, I hasten to add that he was a 'Rationalist' of the old, high and dry nineteenth-century type. For Atheism has come down in the world since those days, and mixed itself with politics and learned to dabble in dirt.³⁸

At age 17 Lewis himself wrote, "I believe in no religion. There is

³⁸ <http://theamericanculture.org/c-s-lewis-and-the-great-knock/>.

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absolutely no proof for any of them, and from a philosophical standpoint Christianity is not even the best.”³⁹

Lewis was neither a professional scientist nor philosopher, but he was well-read in many fields and regularly associated with some of the greatest academics of his time. He attempted throughout his life to give an unbiased hearing to opposite points of view and as a true English gentleman, managed to relate graciously to theists and atheists alike.

Like springtime gradually approaching after a long, Christmasless winter, theism entered Lewis’ view of the world. His good friend Tolkien spoke often with Lewis about belief in the Christian God. Tolkien was persuasive. So was Hugo Dyson. Lewis wrote in *Surprised by Joy* that “The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation.”⁴⁰ This kindly “hardness of God” got through to Lewis in 1930 and he, the reluctant convert, gave himself over to Christ Jesus. Once the deal was done, Lewis not only became a life-long theist but a devout Christian and eventually the most famous modern apologist for the Christian faith. His book *Mere Christianity*, based on a series of BBC talks given during WW2, has been translated into over thirty languages with millions of copies sold globally.

How to summarize Lewis’ argument for the existence of God? In a word...Christianity makes good sense. God’s existence accords with our experience of the world at all levels: physical reality is law-like, moral reality calls for a transcendent order as opposed to moral relativism (how can anyone accuse the Nazis of being more “evil” than the Allies?), our souls long for a beauty of which this world is only a

³⁹ <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/the-most-reluctant-convert/>.

⁴⁰ Lewis, C.S., *Surprised by Joy*, 1955, pp. 228-229.

dim hint. Lewis argued that the Gospel of Jesus carries its unique impact, which is strengthened by logic and history. Lewis put forward the famous “liar, lunatic and Lord” argument, stating that Jesus the Messiah cannot be a just another really good man and moral teacher. Anyone who claims for himself “I am the way, the truth and the life”, as did Jesus, can only be a liar, lunatic or Lord.

Lewis took the cumulative approach to arguing for belief in God, and famously said that Christianity is like the sun’s light, in which we can see the world. Christianity is the light that makes sense of everything.

Anthony Flew (1923-2010)

Sometimes called the greatest atheistic thinker of the 20th century, Anthony flew wrote his seminal piece *Theology and Falsification* in 1950 inspiring a generation of intellectual skeptics with his succinct arguments against theism. Flew proposed the parable of the garden. Two men sit and ponder whether a gardener exists or not. One asserts there is no gardener. The other, a believer, insists the gardener must exist, though he is unable to produce any evidence. In spite of no evidence, and in the face of evidence to the contrary (not only absence of evidence but presence of problematic circumstances like suffering and evil), the believer should start to wonder what is the difference between their “invisible gardener” and no gardener at all. Flew concludes, “What would have to occur or to have occurred to constitute for you a disproof of the love of, or of the existence of, God?”⁴¹

Ironically, modern discoveries in the biological “garden” of real plants and animals became the evidence that convinced Flew to reject atheism. Flew confessed having been hasty in his atheism.

⁴¹ https://philosophynow.org/issues/29/Theology_and_Falsification_A_Golden_Jubilee_Celebration.

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I have said in some of my later atheist writings that I reached the conclusion about the nonexistence of God much too quickly, much too easily, and for what later seemed to me the wrong reasons. I reconsidered this negative conclusion at length and often, but for nearly seventy years thereafter I never found the grounds sufficient to warrant any fundamental reversal. One of those early reasons for my conversion to atheism was the problem of evil.⁴²

Citing arguments from Intelligent Design, he said,

The evidential situation of natural (as opposed to revealed) theology has been transformed in the more than fifty years since Watson and Crick won the Nobel Prize for their discovery of the double helix structure of DNA. It has become inordinately difficult even to begin to think about constructing a naturalistic theory of the evolution of that first reproducing organism.⁴³

Flew also remarked simply, “the argument for Intelligent Design is enormously stronger than it was when I first met it.”⁴⁴ He also was on record saying, “It seems to me that the case for an Aristotelian God who has the characteristics of power and also intelligence, is now much stronger than it ever was before.”⁴⁵

As technology advances to reveal more and more details of the

⁴² <https://www.denverpost.com/2007/12/20/there-is-a-god-by-antony-flew/>.

⁴³ https://philosophynow.org/issues/47/Letter_from_Antony_Flew_on_Darwinism_and_Theology.

⁴⁴ <https://www.allaboutphilosophy.org/antony-flew.htm>.

⁴⁵ <https://www.allaboutphilosophy.org/antony-flew.htm>.

wondrous biochemical machinery of the cell, a plausible argument for Neo-Darwinian random mutation and natural selection becomes harder to sustain. Flew wondered at the highly improbable (if not impossible), massively long strands of coding in DNA and RNA. This biological coding directs equally improbable strands of machine-like proteins to seamlessly fit together. The factory-like operations of the cell function at fantastic speeds and thermodynamic efficiency to cause cell growth, maintenance and reproduction. Observing the miracle of the living cell, Flew sensed in himself a growing dissatisfaction with his atheistic worldview. Wasn't it unrealistic to suppose that strictly unintelligent physical forces could account for the appearance of even the simplest life form? If so, what caused the inestimably far more sophisticated human body and brain to arise?

Flew's atheism to theism conversion sounded to many critics (and disillusioned atheist fans and followers) like some kind of near death panic or the softening of a once great mind. Flew however defended his decision based on developments in modern science and denied any kind of emotional bias or mental failure in his decision. When asked about the existence of the Christian God, he remained agnostic though open to hearing more.

Thomas Nagel (1937-present)

Many people, both theists and atheists, consider philosopher Thomas Nagel an enigma. Though an atheist, he refuses to accept the classical evolutionary paradigm of impersonal, unintelligent physical forces accounting for human consciousness. Stating frankly that he does not think evolution can explain our uniquely human brain activities. He also states that for personal reasons he does not want to appeal to a divine creator. He says,

I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and

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well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that. My guess is that this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition and that it is responsible for much of the scientism and reductionism of our time. One of the tendencies it supports is the ludicrous overuse of evolutionary biology to explain everything about human life, including everything about the human mind This is a somewhat ridiculous situation [I]t is just as irrational to be influenced in one's beliefs by the hope that God does not exist as by the hope that God does exist.⁴⁶

...at least he's honest!

Does he think God could exist? If pure materialism cannot account for human consciousness, then what made us? He stops there. Like other thinkers through the centuries, Nagel observes that many things exist in our world which point toward the existence of something that possesses a different kind of nature than we find in atoms, photons, stars and stones. These things serve as building blocks for all kinds of marvelous structures and systems, but in themselves, regardless of how much time may pass, they have no power to innovate and create functionally ordered systems and information. More specifically they have no power to bring forth consciousness. This much is clear to Nagel, but where does he go next? He reaches the edge of a cliff but after rummaging through his intellectual provisions, stands empty-

⁴⁶ Nagel, Thomas, "The Last Word", pp. 130–131, Oxford University Press, 1997. Dr Nagel (1937–) is Professor of Philosophy and Law at New York University.

handed with no rope to go over the side.

Alvin Plantinga (1932-present)

Alongside the previous two philosophers, Plantinga takes his place as one of the best-known 20th century philosophers. In contrast to Nagel and Flew, Plantinga is not only a theist but a devout Christian. He has worked many decades in the field of philosophy producing a number of important works such as *God and Other Minds* and *The Nature of Necessity*.

Plantinga puts forward the idea that belief in God is a properly foundational belief, shared by most human beings from earliest childhood. This would appear consistent with the fact that studies have consistently shown that the majority of people in the world report belief in a “higher power” of one sort or another. Monotheism can be widely found in the world’s 2 billion Muslims and 2.5 billion Christians. Hindus and Buddhists have very different concepts of theism (closer to pantheism) but nevertheless incorporate non-materialistic ideas into their thinking and religions.

The properly basic belief is akin to our basic beliefs in several areas of human consciousness. We have an innate sense of personal existence. Descartes exclaimed, “I think therefore I am.” After searching for a solid foundation upon which he could construct his reality, he settled on the one thing he could claim to speak about with certainty...himself. On closer examination, however, we can see that his foundation is quite subjective. How does he know that he thinks? How does he know that a thinking entity has existence? By attempting to ground himself upon himself, he is attempting something as futile as a drowning man trying to stand upon himself so he can get his head out of the water for a breath! The properly basic beliefs we share from birth do not usually develop through a long, scientific search, but seem to reside in us inherently. We have the basic belief that we exist, that others exist (we aren’t just looking into the face of and talking to

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zombies), that we accurately remember the events of our last birthday party with friends and that God exists.

How does Plantinga explain this basic belief in God? A Christian with Calvinist theology, Plantinga draws upon Calvin's teaching of the *Sensus Divinitatis*, that all humans are endowed by God with an awareness of his existence. Using computer tech lingo, we could say that the belief in God is installed in our operating system, somewhat like the operational laws programmed into the robotic brains of Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot*. We are wired to know there is a God. Following this reasoning, it would therefore not be a faith defeater for a theist to discover that brain neurology includes a God-circuit. If anything, this could be more evidence for the properly basic belief.

Richard Dawkins (1941-present)

After achieving success as a public promoter of evolutionary theory and emeritus fellow of New College, Oxford, Richard Dawkins became the 21st century mouthpiece for aggressive, scientific atheism. In his shift from popularizing evolutionary theory to using it to draw philosophical and theological implications, Dawkins revealed flawed and inadequate thinking. Philosophers and theologians have a right to study and speak about subjects outside their specialization if done with intellectual humility and careful research. Honest research would take into consideration the scholarship of specialists. It is a curious fact that the biologist Dawkins seeks to speak as the final authority about matters of the existence of God. Whether or not Darwin was right about biological evolution, Dawkins has no valid argument to show that evolution disproves theism. He displays a troubling shallowness in philosophical and theological thinking, which undermines his attempts to use evolutionary biology as the grand final defeater of belief in God. The result is a shallow sort of hackneyed atheism, lacking in intellectual rigor and suggesting little more than bluff and bluster.

Stephen Hawking (1942-2018)

Also having held a highly esteemed science chair at Cambridge occupied by no less than Sir Isaac Newton, theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking became a public icon perhaps celebrated as much for living bravely with a degenerative neuromuscular disease as for contributing to science. The image of his small frame in a wheelchair, surrounded by electronic devices, became etched in public consciousness, rightfully eliciting respect for his will to live and reach for his best under horrible health conditions. Interested in shaping public perceptions of reality, he sought to spark intellectual thought with his popular books *A Brief History of Time* and *The Grand Design*.

Hawking once wrote, “It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going.”⁴⁷ It appears from his many God-related quotes that he was an atheist, or an agnostic. The universe could explain itself, literally. Humans are just a piece of the universe with a mind evolved highly enough to self-examine the universe and then explain it to one another. The entire closed system of planets, suns, stars and galaxies give evidence of a date of origin, some 14 billion years ago. In Hawking’s mind the fact of a cosmic singularity does not necessarily require a supernatural God to get it all started. Hawking remarked, “as long as there is gravity, the universe can and will create itself.”⁴⁸ We might note that this is curiously reminiscent of Kant’s position that it didn’t practically matter whether God exists or not and that no empirical observations had any relevance to the question.

It is also interesting to note that Hawking’s confidence in nature’s power to create nature is subject to the same problem Flew originally

⁴⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2010/sep/02/stephen-hawking-big-bang-creator>.

⁴⁸ Roberts, L. “Stephen Hawking: God was not needed to create the Universe”. *Telegraph*. Posted on telegraph.co.uk September 2, 2010.

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posed to the believer in his 1950 parable of the garden. For Hawking (like Hume), there is always the assumption that no matter what evidence we may ever discover about the universe, a natural explanation, no matter how improbable, is always more preferable than a supernatural one.

Hawking's celebrity status with the general public illustrates an important phenomenon in the modern world. Like the ancient Hebrews waiting for Moses to come down from Mt Sinai with information about God and his Law, modern people might be tempted to expect great intellects like Stephen Hawking to come down from their ivory towers of abstract physics and give us the God-update. Even the average college physics professor can't quite climb as high in our estimation as the rare Hawking. Just an elite few can reach the almost mystical realm of otherworldly knowledge. Accessing that high and holy realm requires fluency in the most advanced mathematics. Anyone who can speak this super-advanced mathematics has approached divinity. In the modern world, theistic notions of revelation are considered mythological. Moses is the past. People say the bible is a book of myths and fables. They believe that Hawking is the future and he says there probably is no God. Since he knows so much more than 99.9999% of the rest of humanity can ever hope to comprehend, who is there to contradict him?

But like Dawkins, Hawking shifts the discussion from his own field of physics, where he excels, to philosophy and theology where he is no more an expert than many other far more ordinary folks. To think of this in another way, consider the Norwegian chess genius Magnus Carlsen. He can defeat several chess players at once without ever looking at their boards. He exhibits almost magical cognitive ability. But can he repair an F-16 engine? Can he counsel an alcoholic to health? Intelligence alone does not guarantee success across every field of knowledge.

Hawking, like Flew and every other human, had a right to examine the world and explore his thoughts and his feelings and come to a conclusion whether or not God exists. Contrary to Flew, it would seem that Hawking, when pondering the cosmos, was intellectually content to envision that somehow purely unintelligent, random, unguided and non-teleological particles and powers produced everything. Did he discover in his stunningly complex physics calculus an obscure formula that said, “God does not exist”? Of course not. Did he ever wonder what kind of evidence, if any, God would leave behind in a universe of his making? Did he ever struggle with Calvin’s *Sensus Divinitatis*? For Hawking, as Laplace, God was an unnecessary hypothesis. But did he truly come to atheism/agnosticism after examining the evidence or did he examine the evidence in light of his assumption of atheistic naturalism? It’s like the chicken and the egg, which came first? It’s doubtful that Hawking could have fully explained either about the origin of a real chicken and egg or whether he preferred atheism *a priori* early in his academic career or came to that position after giving all the evidence a fair hearing.⁴⁹

The Internet (1983-----)

Does the internet have an opinion about the existence of God? Yes and no. Internet cyber-data is an impersonal world (so far at least) existing in billions of computers and cell phones. It has no thoughts of its own—yet—but the internet has opened up a new world of communication. Sometimes its world is friendly and thoughtful, sometimes dark and combative or worse, where people debate the God

⁴⁹ Cosmology shows an astronomically improbable level of fine-tuning of dozens of physical parameters. If these levels were adjusted just a mathematically miniscule amount then life on earth would be impossible. The chance of the universe randomly popping into existence with these parameters fined-tuned perfectly for life on earth is virtually zero. Hawking knew this, but still preferred the materialistic choice of virtual zero than the other option of an intelligent God even though this option is more rational.

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question. Millions of churches and Christians use the internet for spreading their messages. Millions more Muslims use it for their purposes. Christians, Muslims, Jews and many others believe in theism. It is not clear whether the internet has contributed to the loss or increase of faith in societies around world, but surely the number of platforms to discuss, examine and debate ideas has grown exponentially. Believers and atheists, like the two guys sitting in Flew's 1950 garden, have taken to the internet to advance their beliefs. In the early 21st century the so-called "four horsemen" of atheism, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris rolled out many new books and internet media with the aim of converting theists or the undecided to atheism. Their motivation, which certainly was not to earn favor with a deity or save souls from eternal perdition, was to combat what they saw as the dangers of organized religion. After the 9-11 attacks they had plenty of arguments that religion oppresses and kills, and secularism gives liberty and life. They pointed to centuries of religious wars, inquisitions, Crusades and other practices of benighted theists. Furthermore, they argued that religion, in particular young-earth creationism, stunts scientific progress so that as long as Christianity persists in the West it will stunt the progress of civilization. Thus, they fought hard against theism on the grounds of rescuing people and civilizations from danger, darkness and destruction.

As part of the online God debate, the internet serves countless forums dedicated to debating the question of origins. Known for his biting commentary, evolutionary biologist Jerry Coyne at the University of Chicago has tapped into blog power to attack theistic belief, arguing that it is an unnecessary and harmful add-on to the science of biological origins. On the other side of the debate, Francis Collins, former head of the Human Genome Project and a Christian, wrote a book called *The Language of God* and helped found BioLogos, a theistic evolution organization represented online. Defending theism and Intelligent

Design, the Discovery Institute has an active website called *Evolution News and Views*. Young-Earth Creationists certainly are not left out of the game, as Ken Ham and his group *Answers in Genesis* regularly update their website, not to mention having built and outfitted a full-size wooden replica of Noah's Ark that sits in northern Kentucky complete with life-sized models of baby giraffes artistically placed alongside baby dinosaurs. A thorough list of other theistic and atheistic websites could take up an entire chapter. Their popularity indicates the great interest 21st century men and women still have in the question of God's existence.

History's Verdict

We have only surveyed the beliefs of a handful of past thinkers who lived primarily with the point of view of the Western world and the Near East. Had we dipped more deeply into the thinking of Mahatma Gautama Buddha, Confucius, Taoists or other Asian thinkers, we would have discovered non-monotheistic ways of imagining the universe where the lines between the material and spiritual world are blurred or completely absent. Beliefs such as polytheism, reincarnation and the illusionary nature of reality do not rest easily alongside modern materialism. Any kind of religious system that entertains the existence of a non-material realm puts itself at odds with modern atheism. While the atheist may feel mildly tolerant of pantheistic religions since they make no claim about a transcendent, personal creator of the universe, they must ultimately call out any belief system that suggests teleology, the spiritual realm, an afterlife and objective morality.

What does history say? If we can learn anything from history it is that humans are irrepressibly religious. They carve idols, burn sacrifices—tragically at times other humans and their own children—erect grand temples, write holy books, follow prophets, say prayers, create elaborate rituals, revere holy sites, occasionally excommunicate or execute dissenters and seek to make converts. Maybe Calvin was correct in saying that there is a *Sensus Divinitatis* embedded in the

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human heart. If humans aren't worshipping or bowing in awe before a god in the sky or a sacred mountain they can certainly be found bowing before some king's throne, a national flag, a sports team or their own image in the mirror.

Out of this colorful and chaotic assemblage of major and minor divinities, one idea has steadily risen to the surface to eclipse the rest. No matter how much more we learn about it from day to day, we see that the universe is finite. Combined with Semitic thought recorded in the Jewish Scriptures, the basic ideas of ancient Greek thinkers set the stage for theism conceived as belief in a personal, infinite God. Uncaused yet causing, uncreated yet creating, highest good of all goods yet overseeing lower good creatures, this understanding of God has, with certain critical variations, spread widely throughout the world in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Unsurprisingly, these three monotheistic faiths share the common source narratives of Adam and Eve, the call of Abraham, the Law of Moses, the lives of prophets and a coming Messiah figure or age. They disagree on several points of understanding, sometimes quite sharply, but they keep the discussion of theism alive and well in the modern world.



Chapter 3

In the Valley of Decision

No one alive today has met Aristotle, Jesus, Augustine, Muhammed, Darwin or Curie. But they were just as real as we are. They possessed humanity. Standing in the Valley of Decision, they came to different conclusions about God.

The Old Testament records a vivid picture of the severe nature of decision-making. The prophet Joel says,

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!
For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.
The sun and moon have become dark,
And the stars have lost their brightness.
The Lord roars from Zion
And utters His voice from Jerusalem,
And the heavens and the earth quake.
But the Lord is a refuge for His people,

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And a stronghold for the sons of Israel.⁵⁰

Decisions have consequences, sometimes very far-ranging, affecting people and times far into the future. We are asking if a single, supreme God exists. But why am I asking does God exist? Why do I want to know? Why am I asking anything at all?

Sigmund Freud thought that God was in our imagination, a mythical father-figure. Others theorize that the ruling class uses the threat of a vengeful, punishing God as a sociological tool to keep people under control. God is the big “boogey-man” who will get you if you don’t obey. Another person says that God is just a fairy tale like mermaids or hobbits. Yes, the human mind can soar into wild fantasies. But that doesn’t disprove God. Did it make any ultimate difference in the daily lives of Plato or Augustine or Darwin whether God exists or not? What is at stake in the Valley of Decision?

Decisions have consequences. The prophet Joel powerfully warns of a coming time of destruction. He refers to the sun, moon and stars. The multitudes stirring restlessly in the Valley of Decision are the entire human race. Didn’t Plato, Caesar, Pilate, Constantine, Buddha, Muhammed, Victoria, Hitler and Gandhi each in his or her own turn take a stand in the Valley of Decision? Is there a God or not?

The question of God’s existence is perhaps the greatest question ever. People have stood in their own Valley of Decision and come to different conclusions. Science cannot explain why some people choose belief in God and others do not. There must be a different reason.

What if an eternal, immaterial God really exists? What if he sees us, hears and thinks about us? What if he has loving, paternal feelings for us in his divine heart? Why doesn’t he make his existence more

⁵⁰ Joel 3:14-16.

certain? Some have put this puzzle under the label *the hiddenness of God*. Blaise Pascal observed this odd phenomenon.

Willing to appear openly to those who seek him with all their heart, and to be hidden from those who flee from him with all their heart, God so regulates the knowledge of himself that he has given indications of himself which are visible to those who seek him and not to those who do not seek him. There is enough light for those to see who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition.⁵¹

Pascal knew people who could not be convinced that God existed. He knew people who didn't care.

No Excuses

This puzzle of God's existence has become more and more mysterious. Can a person be certain that God exists or doesn't? Many thoughtful people claim to choose atheism based on observable evidence. They say, 1. The universe and life can create itself, 2. If God existed he wouldn't allow evil to exist, and, 3. Science has disproven many religions and myths. They believe there is not "a shred of evidence" for God existence. In spite of these arguments millions of other people believe in God.

This is the problem of the hiddenness of God. Why doesn't God just plainly show himself to atheists, deists and agnostics? Children can rebel or obey, argue or submit, love or hate their mothers and fathers. But can they honestly try to argue that their parents do not exist?⁵²

⁵¹ <https://apologetics315.com/2012/09/pascal-on-gods-hiddenness/>.

⁵² Oddly enough, in the modern climate of radical individual subjectivity, one could imagine a child claiming that he or she feels like they are a parentless person trapped

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Why does God allow his creatures to deny his existence?

Many modern people say God's existence is not only hidden but irrational and irrelevant. The average atheist says, "I have plenty of good reasons for not believing in God and basically no reason to believe." The agnostic says, "Who knows? Maybe God exists, but what difference does it make? None! He is too far away."⁵³

The Apostle Paul was a Jewish religious leader highly educated in Jewish and Greek culture. In the 1st century he persecuted Jesus' followers. After his own miraculous encounter with the Messiah Jesus on the road to Damascus he changed his outlook completely. He commented on atheism in his powerful letter to Rome.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 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. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals

in a biological body that was reproduced by parents.

⁵³ Deism says there is a Creator who created the universe but stepped away to let it operate on its own. Knowledge of the creator comes from reason alone and not revelation. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deism>.

and creeping things.⁵⁴

Who did Paul describe? Writing two thousand years ago in the Roman Empire he didn't know my unbelieving psychology professor. The Apostle Paul, never one to mince words, had in mind a certain kind of person who exchanged wisdom for folly.

Paul encountered many kinds of people on his travels across the Roman Empire. He debated polytheist Greeks in Athens (Acts 17), theistic Jews in Asia Minor (Act 21), Roman leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 25) and Jewish leaders in Rome (Acts 27). He agreed with the traditional Jewish people that God is one. The Romans and Greeks practiced polytheism, worshipping a pantheon of gods who vied for power and position. Museums are filled with Roman and Greek idols. They crafted images of humans, birds, animals and reptiles as Paul wrote about. In some forms of technology the ancient people were perhaps more advanced than modern people. Their artwork is beautiful, but according to Paul, a sad exchange for God himself.

Paul challenges us with an apparent paradox. He writes in Romans, "For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse." How do you clearly see that which is invisible? Paul moves close to poetry here, as though one might say to a lover, "My love for you hidden in the depths of my heart is here for you to clearly see." The unseen thing is seen by its effects. Love can manifest in whispered words, cherished gifts, and self-sacrifice. An unseen gust of wind sends autumn leaves to the ground. A radio plays music from an unseen signal bouncing through the atmosphere. Paul applies the same logic to the cause and effect of an eternal God who exists outside of time and space. Finite "things that are made" (*creaturely-ness*) are the

⁵⁴ Romans 1:18-23.

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effect, the eternal power and divinity (*God-ness*) are the cause.

Paul was confident that in light of evidence for God's existence no one has an excuse to say otherwise. Polytheists have no excuse. Idolaters have no excuse. Unbelievers have no excuse. No one has an excuse for ignorance or indifference to the existence of the ultimate, supreme, eternal creator God.

The Great Exchange

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans states matter-of-factly that humans universally share a sort of intuitive reasoning that theism is true. Is this the kind of intuition that Plantinga is talking about with his Properly Basic Belief (*Sensus Divinitatis*)? Children typically lack the kind of adult reasoning that one might hope to find in a graduate philosophy department, but their built-in reasoning prepares them to face other humans as real persons, not simply robots or zombies. They know, very deeply in fact, that their mother and father, their siblings, their neighbors, and the strangers in line at the grocery are profoundly different from the sofa, the wall portrait of long-deceased Uncle Bob and even their pet hamster.⁵⁵ Did they come to this conclusion as a result of long and considered reasoning? The other-person-sense and the God-sense (*Sensus Divinitatis*) start very early in the human experience, possibly before birth. In this Romans text, Paul argues that theism is the necessary final stop on anyone's honest journey in search of the ultimate truth. His argument is not necessarily sophisticated, but it is rational. Just as a little child can quickly grasp the reasoning of one apple plus one apple equals two apples, they can sense that reality both within and without cry out for a reality-maker. Just as a child can learn very early in his or her development that Papa Bear, Momma Bear and Baby Bear reasoned backwards from their

⁵⁵ A child might be fooled by a life-like AI robot, but only inasmuch as it is intelligently designed to mimic uniquely human traits.

disturbed porridge and favorite chairs that *somebody* had been mucking around in their forest home, anyone with normal human senses and reason can look around and figure out that *somebody* very powerful has been stirring about the universe. At least that is what Paul thought when he said “that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them.” Is this the reason why even atheist Francis Crick wrote, “Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved.”⁵⁶ Expressed another way, “People have a clear sense that the world is designed, which naturally would imply a Designer, but they must constantly remind themselves that there is no Designer, therefore the appearance of design is illusionary.”

If Paul is correct that God has adequately manifested his existence in the reasoning of every normal human being, doesn't this mean that God's existence is not a great question that resists certainty? Is Paul saying that we *can* be certain God exists? Is it indeed true that God's existence is a plain fact, indisputable, unquestionable, rock solid and open for all to plainly see? Can we just say discussion closed, let's move on and thank you very much!?

Perhaps.

Then why do unbelievers exist?! How could atheism have ever entered the human consciousness? Why do people sometimes wonder, “What if there is no God?” or “I wonder if there is a God?” Why has anyone ever bothered to have a serious discussion about God's existence? If, as Paul writes, God manifests his existence in every person, showing his existence clearly to everyone so that no one can excuse himself saying, “How could I have known that God exists? I had no reason to think such a thing, no evidence whatsoever of his existence, not even an inkling!” If Paul is correct that theism is an obvious and

⁵⁶ <http://hyperphysics.phy-astr.gsu.edu/Nave-html/Faithpathh/Crick.html>.

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logical belief, from whence come most members of the National Academy of Science, a great many college professors and countless skeptics and free-thinkers? What produced Marx and Russell and Hitchens? What happened in their lives between God's existence being "manifest in them" and their declaring "Not enough evidence, God! Not enough evidence."⁵⁷ One possible cause of unbelief might be uncomfortable to accept. Is Paul suggesting that at some deep level unbelievers have disconnected from reality?

New medical and psychological insights have given insights into a variety of human experiences, some of which create personal and/or social dissonance. For example, Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is marked by a significant lack of empathy, exaggerated sense of personal importance and extreme need for admiration of the self. NPD at its worst produces men and women who have trouble understanding, accepting and validating the personhood of other humans. NPD disconnects them from the reality of shared humanness. Other psychological disorders can cause a detachment from reality at one level or another. A sufferer of OCD might fret over having run over a pedestrian in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. A delusional schizophrenic can live in fear that enemies are stalking their every move. Perhaps solipsism, the philosophy that everyone and all reality might be a figment of one's imagination, is also some form of mental illness. A solipsist might be entertaining to a point, until he or she feels they have the right to dictate their will to everyone around.

Philosophy departments are famous for asking questions like "am I a brain in a vat?" There's the story of the freshman philosophy student approaching her professor the morning after an intense lecture on personhood. With eyes red from a sleepless night the girl says,

⁵⁷ <https://www.whyfaith.com/2008/08/24/not-enough-evidence/>.

“Professor, I had a terrible night worrying about my existence. Do I really exist?” The professor wryly asked in reply, “Who wants to know?” Where is the border between philosophically induced existential angst and mental disorder? Is it a mental disorder to disconnect with the reality of passing time, physical objects, the personhood of other humans or the law of cause and effect pointing to an Ultimate Cause? Can healthy and honest cognitive faculties logically reject the manifest evidence of God? Is this to say that unbelief in God is a psychological glitch?

Paul offers an explanation for the source of atheism. He says that God is invisible and his existence is known indirectly through the created order (personal and impersonal reality). Paul argues for God’s existence based on what is evident to a normal human observer. Therefore, if someone wants to argue with Paul that God does not necessarily exist they must argue not from God’s invisibility, but from the observed cosmos. But if Paul is correct that the universe practically cries out loud that God exists, why would anyone be compelled to protest the issue? If rejecting belief in God is not a psychological disorder and if it contradicts sound reasoning, what is it?

Truth in a Death Lock

After the Soviet Union collapsed in the 1990s, my family moved to the new Republic of Kazakhstan and worked with a non-profit company tasked with accessing and mitigating environmental problems. In the course of five years I had many conversations with local friends about their former lives under the Communists. One of my friends shared with me a story from his years as rector in a nearby university. During the 1980s he knew a bright German student. The ruthless dictator Stalin had deported his family, like many Soviet Germans, from the Volga River region to Central Asia. Not a few of these relocated Germans held to their Christian faith despite discrimination and outright persecution. Toward the end of this young man’s degree program he approached the rector and confided in him, “I must tell

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you, I am not an atheist, I believe in God.” This was a dangerous admission during the Soviet days and my friend told him, “Well, you know I am supposed to report this and if I do, you won’t be allowed to graduate. But actually I believe in God too. Let’s keep this to ourselves.” They did and the young man received his diploma that spring.

Consider again Paul’s letter to the Romans. He lays out another kind of paradox, saying that some people “hold the truth in unrighteousness.” Here we find Paul using the curious Greek word *κατέχω* (*katecho*). Like many words, it can have a number of connotations. Bible translators have often sought to convey its meaning with the English word *suppress*. Thus, it becomes clear that Paul is describing a certain kind of person who is in a struggle—if not mortal combat—with Truth. They “hold the truth” in the same way a wrestler seeks to get an opponent in a death lock. The way to victory is to “hold down” the truth for the final count. This is more than a casual handshake, which may or may not conceal passive-aggressive anger.

This is war.

Let’s suppose that there is a *real* reality, from commonplace things like wooden chairs and springtime flowers, to the abstract like memories, dark matter and an eternal, metaphysical God who created the cosmos out of nothing. We can presume that real reality exists objectively and independently from ourselves. We have five bodily senses and cognitive faculties of reasoning that bring us into contact and relationship with real reality.

Occasionally things can go very wrong in our bodies and minds so that at some level or another we may lose contact with reality. A loving mother with an adoring family can become so depressed that it causes to think her family would be better off without her. In a tragic moment she drives to a nearby bridge and jumps to her death. What happened?

Did she willingly suppress the truth that her family deeply loved her? It seems unlikely. The more likely explanation is that she suffered tragic mental illness. We mourn for such persons and continually seek medical breakthroughs that would help people not lose a right connection with the truth.

The Apostle Paul is not talking about people like this young mother. Something else is at work in the lives of people who would otherwise be considered sane and normal individuals. These folks actively struggle to pin down the truth not because of a mental defect, but a because of a moral one. The word for this problem is *ἀδικία* (*adikia*), which translates into English as unrighteousness, injustice or morally wrong. Fighting the truth is morally wrong. A witness in a murder trial who deliberately withholds key testimony to protect the murderer has committed a moral wrong. In our legal system perjury, or lying under oath, is a crime. Lying against the truth is a serious moral evil. Perhaps the witness wants to protect the murderer because she and he have planned to take the stolen money flee the country after the trial. Perhaps the murderer killed her husband and the witness has an adulterous relationship with her. Lying against the truth can be motivated by layer upon layer of moral corruption.

Just a moment! Have we now shifted from evaluating atheism as a kind of psychological disorder to suggesting that unbelievers struggle against God because they are morally deficient? Isn't that preposterous? Atheists, agnostics and deists often retort that they are at least as moral as theists and often more so. On closer inspection, they would say that a) it is not at all a moral issue that makes them choose atheism but an intellectual one and, b) atheism does not make them any less kind and moral and good than anyone else. How could anyone have the nerve to suggest that atheism is a moral question?

Yet the Apostle Paul suggests precisely that.

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Theism Certain or Not?

This book started with the goal of understanding why, if God does in fact exist, would he create a world and then not only sweep away convincing evidence of his existence but seemingly put forth convincing evidence to the contrary. Does God exist? This is one of the greatest questions we can ask. Is the answer certain or not? Throughout history people have debated the question, answered it differently, found it very interesting or not at all, pondered and talked and written about it. If God's existence is certain, why so much fuss about it? If it is obvious to any normal person that a personal God exists, why this book? Why do millions of people claim agnosticism or atheism?

The first possible answer is that perhaps unbelievers are correct that God does not exist. In the words of Carl Sagan, the universe is all there ever was, is, or will be. Mermaids, elves and God are equally mythical, nothing more than human imagination. If that is true, then atheists have come to the correct conclusion based on the evidence at hand. Millions of people, whether from superior intelligence, education, social conditioning, genetic disposition, or just good luck have a better grasp of reality than millions of theists.

The second possible answer is that God does exist and atheists are wrong. The reasons for their mistake about God's existence could be similar to the reasons just listed about why theists might be wrong: intelligence, education, social conditioning, genetic disposition or bad luck. For whatever reason, perhaps these millions of atheists never thought about God and if they did they missed something critical.

Thirdly, along comes this pesky Apostle Paul with his diagnosis of the issue. Paul's writings predate Hume and Darwin almost 2000 years and their existence show that the tendency to deny God is an intellectual and moral position perhaps as old as humanity itself. Furthermore, he also presented a sobering idea. To deny God's

existence is to suppress reality. To deny God isn't just apathetic, ignorant, flippant or irrational...it is immoral. Furthermore, atheism at its heart might be motivated by something other than level-headed, unbiased arguments. Could it be fueled by a desire to live apart from God's moral structure? Is it a form of injustice or unrighteousness, a personal rebellion against God's moral universe with a view to position oneself in ways to deny God and other's what is rightfully theirs?

Suppose Paul is correct in this flinty assessment of the issue. We can then say that God has created a universe in which his existence can seem uncertain not because of a lack of philosophical or scientific evidence, but because he created human being as free moral agents.

Here is a key point. The Great Question of God's existence (specifically the Christian God) is unlike any other question we could ever ask, because how we answer it precipitates a complete revolution in where we direct our ultimate allegiance and obedience. Humans who want to be their own moral master have a strong motivation to resist the idea of a God-King. Who could have a compelling moral complaint about the existence of the sun or the moon? What kind of impact could a quantum field have on our moral life? What difference does it make to our morality if paired quantum particles can move simultaneously on the opposite sides of the universe? Does the flatness or roundness of the earth have anything to say to how we decide right and wrong? No sane person disputes these questions or attempts to hold down these truth claims in a mortal death lock. There is no motivation to suppress the truth of natural phenomenon in unrighteousness.⁵⁸ Is there an immensely large ball of fire in the sky

⁵⁸ One might argue that atheists suppress certain biological evidences which undermines Darwinian evolution in an attempt to bolster their arguments against God. More on that in the next section. But our common experiences in daily natural observations have little or no bearing on our personal morality. The fact that the earth spins around in 24 hours says nothing about whether a thief has broken an objective moral law.

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nine light-minutes away from earth? Is there a law of gravity that anchors us to the earth so we don't float off into space? Is the earth a giant ball of rock that spins counterclockwise so the sun appears to rise in the east each morning? Is there an Almighty Creator of the cosmos? Are each of these questions essentially indisputable? Does anyone have a good excuse to deny the evidence? But even if these all require the same line of logical thinking, only one has moral implications for us as free moral agents. The average person cares very little whether the earth is round or not because the shape of the earth does not care about us. If scientists prove it's round, so what? The shape of the earth has no bearing on our moral choices, so there is no motivation to suppress any particular geological theory. But the possibility of a moral Judge raises potentially terrifying implications about our behavior. If there is evidence—however subtle or obvious—for God's existence, the natural impulse of those who find themselves in opposition to him is to undertake the cover-up of the ages.

Who is playing Hide and Seek?

Genesis chapter three tells the story of the moral *Fall* of the first man and woman. The earliest drama in the Bible is a story of hide and seek. It's worth a closer look. Placed in a beautiful and lush garden, Adam and his wife Eve lived in moral innocence and unspoiled love with their Creator God. This story gives us just the most basic brushstrokes of the picture. This marvelously beautiful picture is heavy on poetic meaning with few details. Chapter two explains that Adam did not live in relational isolation but took care of the animals and plants. He needed human companionship, so God put him to sleep in the world's first anesthetized surgery and shaped his wife from one of his ribs. Eve's arrival brought more life and activity to the garden with animals relating to each other and to Adam and Eve. The first humans enjoyed their new marriage. Every living thing celebrated life under the watchful care of their intimately involved creator God and his

appointed stewards. These passages abound in beautiful, poetic images, but that does not diminish their historical reality. These were real humans, a living biosphere and their maker.

Again, as with so much of these first chapters of Genesis, we are not given mathematical certainty about intervals and physical spaces.⁵⁹ But one thing is certain. A moment arrived when Adam and Eve experienced a seismic shift in their relationship with God. A very peculiar creature entered Paradise. Out of one's worst nightmare, the snaky thing subtly slithered up to Eve. It was not only stealthy but crafty. It suggested a question to her. "Did God tell you not to eat from the fruit trees in this garden?"

She tried arguing with the alien enemy, "We can eat from the fruit trees, only not from the tree at the garden's center. To do so is death."

The serpent contradicted her. "No, you won't die, you will become gods!"

We do not fully know Eve's inner state of confidence at the moment she picked the forbidden fruit and took a bite. Was she hesitant or fully convinced that the serpent was telling her the truth? Some moments afterwards she shared the forbidden fruit with her husband who apparently had no qualms about seeking to be a god.

⁵⁹ Young-Earth Creationists take the life-spans listed in the genealogies of first chapters as complete and thus reliable for using in calculating the precise age of the earth, which comes out around 6000 years old. When counter-evidence is presented for an older earth, the assumption is made that just as God must have created Adam and Eve with the appearance of age (maybe 30 years old?) he created the earth with an appearance of age. One philosophical problem with this assumption is that we have no idea of knowing what a "young earth" would look like if it had no appearance of aging. Another problem is that if God did create the universe with an appearance of age, that is to simply say that the universe was created with the appearance of death and decay, since it is the law of decay (entropy) that gives objects an aged appearance.

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Was the awareness of their wrong-doing sudden or did it slowly increase, like a mild headache that turns into a pounding migraine? What happened next? They experienced the metaphorical “opening of their eyes”, which looked anew upon their beautiful naked bodies, this time not with innocent love and longing, but with twinges (or surging) of selfish lust and loathing. This, coupled with a self-consciousness, which we can only surmise may have been caused by the sudden realization that these bodies could become sources of temptation as well as holy pleasure, made them scramble around in the bushes for something to cover themselves. The first recorded act of technology in the Bible is a response to shame. Adam and Eve stitched up some fig leaves. Then they tried to play hide and seek.

No little chatter has been made over the years about the “hiddenness of God.” Remember our friend Pascal’s comment?

Willing to appear openly to those who seek him with all their heart, and to be hidden from those who flee from him with all their heart, God so regulates the knowledge of himself that he has given indications of himself which are visible to those who seek him and not to those who do not seek him. There is enough light for those to see who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition.

Yet here in Genesis is a most extraordinary thing. In the first game of hide and seek the first player to take his turn hiding was most certainly not God...it was the humans.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where

are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”⁶⁰

One big mistake in reading this literary drama is to not step back and see all the different points of view. Dominating the scene is the nightmarish serpent conversing with Eve followed by their disobedience of God’s command. But there was a first-hand audience watching the whole sordid affair. We already know from earlier chapters that God had the bird’s-eye view of everything, just as the master playwright sees everything in greatest detail. At what point did Adam and Eve forget this? Had they not matured in their thinking, innocent though it was through and through, to understand that God never looked away for a moment? God was never hidden.

Was Adam’s attempt to hide from God humanity’s first attempt to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” as Paul writes? Can we push this connection a little farther? In Genesis we see a God who does not hide himself. He does just the opposite by making his presence known to a tragically ashamed man and woman, whose moral senses have been awakened to profound failure by their disobedience. They have no excuse to innocently claim that God does not exist or that they themselves are the ultimate gods of the cosmos. They know for sure that God exists but they want to escape. Their only escape is a laughably pathetic attempt at dressing up in some wilted fig leaves which they think will make everything look just hunky-dory. The ridiculous image recalls a scene from the movie *Mr. Bean’s Holiday* where he flashes a crayon-colored cartoon identity card to a security officer. Adam and Eve’s best attempt at projecting their newly devised morality were some shabby, dried, hand-knit fig-leaf underwear!

Modern man has come a long way from the Garden and wilted fig-

⁶⁰ Genesis 3:8-10.

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leaves, but has God shifted his strategy and taken to slipping deeper and deeper into hiddenness? Is Pascal right to say that, “God so regulates the knowledge of himself that he has given indications of himself which are visible to those who seek him and not to those who do not seek him”? Does this fully square with Paul’s assertion that no one has an excuse? Yes, in that Pascal acknowledges that God’s apparent hiddenness is dependent on the attitude of the individual. The person with a “contrary disposition” won’t see God. The problem with the way Pascal presents this dynamic is that he seems to say that God actively hides himself from the person not interested in knowing him, whereas Paul plainly states that the morally resistant person engages God in active combat. Pascal allows that a contrary person will remain in atheism because God sees their disinterest and thus withholds convincing evidences. Paul, however, echoes the Genesis drama. God is actively and intimately reaching into the human life, yet some people put up a great struggle to hide, suppress and even destroy the evidence. If Paul and Pascal agree on one point, it is that God allows humans freedom and power great enough to suppress the evidence for his existence. When a person chooses any kind of unbelief, it is because God chooses not to override their attempt to suppress the truth.

Hidden God or a Hiding Humanity?

We probably all know some atheists, deists, agnostics, pantheists and theists. Some of them are our friends and relatives. Each of us more or less falls into one category or another. It is almost certain we do not know anyone who thinks the moon is made of cheese. Is the nature of the moon no more or less knowable than the existence of God? If not, then why is the moon’s composition almost universally agreed upon and God’s existence so hotly contested? Is it possible that there is an eternal, all-powerful, all-loving, personal, spiritual God who exists but he has erased all his “fingerprints” from creation? Has he swept away all his foot-prints and then camouflaged his existence

to give the impression that he doesn't or never could have existed? On the other hand, has God left clear signs of his existence that are more than sufficient to convince every human? Is the question of God's existence one that resists certainty or do humans resist the certainty of his existence?

Great Question #2

Where did life come from?



Chapter 4

If Darwinism is True

For a long time folks have been trying to marry God and Darwinism or divorce them from one another entirely. If he exists, could God have used natural evolutionary processes and common ancestry to direct the origin of life and emergence of species? Could he have started with a microscopic life from which all living organisms descended in a seamless branching tree? Did God perhaps create the world and everything in it pretty much as it is today six thousand years ago? Could God have spoken into existence the universe in the Big Bang and then over subsequent epochs of time intervened here and there to miraculously create new life forms *de novo*? Assuming an all-powerful God, why couldn't he do anything he wanted?

Is Darwinism compatible with theism?

Since Charles Darwin published his famous book *The Origin of the Species* in 1859 the second Great Question about our origins has generated as much heat as a fission reactor. Centuries before Darwin, the sun-bathed Greeks lounged on mosaic floors and pondered the question

of origins. Semitic peoples offered their own origins narrative in the book of Genesis (supplemented by numerous other creation texts scattered throughout the Old Testament). Darwin's theory of biological evolution only covers a tiny slice of the larger story of astrophysics and cosmology. Origin discussions can wander around like Alice's rabbit hole that just goes down into an infinite regression. No matter how deep you descend into time and space, you always wind up asking, "but where did THAT come from?!"

Why does Darwin's theory of evolution churn up so much heat? Newtonian physics and Einstein's theory of relativity are equal to evolutionary theory, if not superior in scientific importance, but they don't get folks so worked up. I would like to suggest two possible reasons.

First, since Darwin proposed his theory, many people have attached to it significant theological implications. Thomas Huxley wrote,

the whole analogy of natural operations furnishes so complete and crushing an argument against the intervention of any but what are termed secondary causes, in the production of the phenomena of the universe; that, in the view of the intimate relations between Man and the rest of the living world; and between the forces exerted by the latter and all other forces, I can see no excuse for doubting that all are coordinated terms of Nature's great progression, from the formless to the formed — from the organic to the inorganic — from blind force to conscious will and intellect.⁶¹

Simply put, Darwin's theory of evolution provided a satisfactory

⁶¹ <https://www.discovery.org/a/110/>.

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solution to how impersonal physical forces could produce the living world. The theory neatly replaced God with chance and survivability. If Darwin was correct, why bother with belief in God? He certainly wasn't necessary to explain the marvelous world of living creatures.

While Huxley remained an agnostic (he personally coined the term) regarding the question of God's existence, Richard Dawkins stated plainly, "Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist."⁶² For Dawkins, Darwin lifted the veil of mystery from the apparent design in living systems which would logically suggest an intelligent and personal designer. If nature could design itself, why believe in God? But if a person is predisposed to deny God's existence, and if evolutionary theory is essential for remaining a convinced atheist, then evolutionary theory must be defended at all costs regardless of its scientific merits.

The second reason that Darwin's theory of evolution still triggers people might be due to the fact that it is a different kind of scientific theory than Newtonian or quantum physics.⁶³ Darwin was not a mathematician and his theory was grounded less in repeatable experiments and depended more on—to be frank—speculative storytelling. Physics relies upon precise and provable mathematical calculus. Equations can be used to successfully land an unmanned Martian rover on an area the size of a baseball diamond hundreds of thousands of miles from earth. Darwin not only did not provide that kind of precise calculus in his theories, but the incomprehensibly large

⁶² Dawkins, R. *The Blind Watchmaker*, p6. One wonders, if Darwin had not come along with his theory of evolution, would Richard Dawkins be a believer in God based on inexplicable evidence of design?

⁶³ Sometimes this characterization refer to the contrast between the "hard sciences" of physics, chemistry, geology, etc. and the "soft sciences" of sociology, psychology, history, etc. The former draw on quantitative methods and the latter qualitative.

and complex object of his research (all of biological history and diversity) prohibited him using it had he even had the training. Lacking definitive mathematical formulations, Darwinism winds up making suggestions more akin to witnesses in a court case than laboratory results in a physics experiment.⁶⁴

Thus, since Darwin's theory can be characterized as historical science rather than purely experimental science, it is much harder to evaluate with the principle of falsification. Criminal prosecutors face the same problem. How does one decisively convince the jury of a crime committed ten or twenty years ago? The physical evidence is sparse, there are no direct witnesses to events, and worse yet the accused is no longer alive. Consider the problem of the Egyptian pyramids. We have—literally—immense piles of evidence that somebody constructed the pyramids. But their precise methods and motivations may never be fully known. The lack of repeatability and ability of archeologists to reduce the subject to mathematical equations leaves modern people free to debate their origins. One fellow's theory may be no better or worse than another's. The same is true for Darwin's theory of evolution. Like an archeologist puzzling over the origin of the pyramids, Darwin puzzled over the origin of life and species and hammered out his theory over hundreds of pages of suggestive stories and sketches of a branching tree of life slowly giving rise to creatures whose descendants would eventually grow tall as trees and prey upon

⁶⁴ With the advent of genetic studies that focus on the remarkable computer-like coding found in DNA, biology has been forced to use mathematics more and more. This however has not produced any significant new repeatable experiments that can establish the theory of evolution. The most cited mathematical evidence for evolution is the DNA time-clock which is interpreted as correctly mapping when an ancient organism branched on the tree of common descent. However, this time-clock is filled with anomalies and proceeds with the a priori assumption of common descent rather than proving it. It can only serve as a tautology. Obviously organisms have shared traits which are visible to the naked eye (cats and dogs both have canine teeth), but this does not prove common descent.

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one another, before sticking in muck to become fossils for us to puzzle over. The archeologist may get quite close to the truth when he theorizes that a couple of hundred slaves quarried a 20-ton stone block in the Upper Nile region and then transported it down-river in a large barge for the Great Pyramid. He may be quite far from the truth when he says it housed the second dynasty Pharaoh. He or she tries to carefully construct the past, but with serious constraints. Darwin was likewise disadvantaged. Furthermore, modern evolutionary biologists, even with the benefits of digital technologies and 150 years of scientific advances, are still speculating primarily about the past. For example, they lack definitive support for such claims as mitochondria was a simple bacteria that was taken into eukaryotic cells in the course of evolution. Has anyone ever seen a bacterium co-opted by a eukaryotic cell and turned into a successfully functioning organelle? No. This is a speculation with no empirical support.

Richard Dawkins, popular spokesperson for evolutionary theory, would take issue with our suggestion. As far as he is concerned, Darwinism is as uncontestable as is God's existence for the Apostle Paul. He writes,

It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid or insane (or wicked, but I'd rather not consider that).⁶⁵

In light of the previous analysis of the Apostle Paul's confidence in the observable evidence for God, we should ask, is either of these two men justified to say that their particular worldview is so certain that only an irrational or dishonest person would desire to reject them?

⁶⁵ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/review-the-greatest-show-on-earth-by-richard-dawkins/article4293723/>.

So Quickly Back to Suppression?

Contrasting the Apostle Paul and Dawkins is not just a convenient choice since we just took an in-depth look at Paul's ideas. Their positions are deeply intertwined. When placed side by side, the two positions appear to be mirror images. Both point to the physical world claiming that it confirms their belief about God. Paul says the physical world convinces us of God's existence. Dawkins claims that the physical world convinces us that God does not exist. Each in his turn will accuse dissenters of committing evil. Paul says that God's existence is a fact so clear, that only a morally compromised person could deny it. Dawkins likewise claims that atheistic evolution is so obviously a fact that to willingly deny it is to have wicked motivations (we wonder why he would rather not consider immoral motivations and anyway what difference it makes in an amoral universe). Either way, somebody is suppressing the truth.

The first section of the book concludes by asking whether God's existence is a question that resists certainty or if humans resist the certainty of his existence. We can apply this question to the sweeping materialistic theory of life's origins. Specifically, is the naturalistic theory of evolution (and atheism as a result) a question that resists certainty or a certainty that humans resist?

So, Dawkins and his co-evolutionists claim to rely solely on science for proof of evolution. Writing centuries before the Enlightenment, Paul nevertheless employed a basic method of natural observation and reasoning. Both men draw upon the logic of cause and effect. We are here today. Our existence here must have some earlier cause. Paul posits the existence of an immaterial, spiritual entity outside the laws of physics (their creator) but who is the only logical explanation for them. Dawkins posits the existence of a natural physical process (evolution) that must operate according to the observed laws of physics. Dawkins assumes that if life could evolve naturally, then God does not exist. For him, to prove that Darwinism is true is to prove

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theism false.

These two men place before us two choices. Paul says that God's existence is obviously true. Dawkins says God's existence is obviously not true. Paul's position says nothing specific about the processes used in creating life and species. Dawkins' position says that all of life, however much it defies natural explanations, is the result of unintelligent, random forces. Each position must be evaluated based upon its own merits, not its implications.

Lots and Lots of Paths

Modern people love having options. In regard to the question of life origins (the first life and all species), are there perhaps more options than the binary choice presented between theism and atheism? Not for Professor Dawkins. As a polemicist he prefers a clear cut yes/no argument. His argument is as follows:

- A. If naturalistic evolution is proven true, then atheism is true,
- B. Science has proven naturalistic evolution is true,
- C. Therefore God does not exist.

Some less dogmatic thinkers take a more nuanced approach, working to juxtapose theism and Darwinian evolution. In this section we will explore other scientific and theological positions. The pertinent issue for now is this: Is Darwin's theory of evolution a convincing defeater of theism? Does theism rise and fall on Darwinism?

Critiquing Dawkins' logic may do little good in altering widespread public perceptions. An attentive college freshman should be able to quickly ascertain that providing evidence for evolution does not crowd out God any more or less than giving an argument for atheism by showing how lightning is caused by natural atmospheric conditions. Even in his Romans treatise, the Apostle Paul does not refer to specific inexplicable physical phenomenon to argue for God's existence. For example, he could have imaginatively claimed that the volcano Vesalius

erupted when God yanked the chains of little demons living deep in its belly. What would we say about God when we discover that eruptions are caused by geo-thermal activity? We would mock Paul, “Ahhh, silly Paul said God likes to yank around demons, but modern man knows that’s pure mythology!” In all his substantive New Testament writings, Paul never attributes God’s existence to specific physical phenomenon which could later be debunked. To the contrary, on one occasion he urges his young mentor Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach problems as a natural remedy. Imagine if Paul had told Timothy that wine’s medicinal powers were evidence that it contains particles of angel wings! How disappointed he would have been when later generations learned to explain wine’s properties in purely natural terms. In their arguments for theism the New Testament writers never employed biology arguments for God existence. One might honestly wonder, where did Dawkins et al. get their syllogism that proving evolutionary theory true disproves theism?

If Darwin’s theory of evolution is neutral in its theistic implications, no more supportive or unsupportive of theism than say, the natural explanation for the water cycle of evaporation and precipitation, then why the theological fuss? Why is Darwinism such a big deal?

Let’s suppose here for the sake of discussion that both Paul and Dawkins make a big overreach in their conclusions about God’s existence. Perhaps theism and atheism each face more serious potential defeaters than either side is willing to consider. If that is true, it brings us back to the foundational issue of this book that there are Great Questions that resist certainty, that after all the evidence is in and all the arguments are carefully considered, the questions still cannot be answered with strong or absolute certainty. We can say that $2+2=4$ and then mathematically prove it. We can observe gravity by climbing the Tower of Pisa and repeatedly dropping a steel ball. But perhaps we move into a different kind of knowing when we speak about God’s existence or discuss whether we can be certain that in our

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distant past we share the same ancestor with a lemur, a pine tree and an octopus.

Where did we come from? We see that one ancient writer and one modern writer do not think people have to be uncertain about this question. Paul sees certainty for the existence of a divine creator. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins is certain that Darwin's theory is a theism-busting fact as plain as the large horn on a white rhino's snout. These two perspectives represent the great divide that exists today among many believers and unbelievers.

A popular refrain these days is "follow the evidence." Anthony Flew remarked that he had followed the physical evidence in his journey from atheism to theism. Karl Popper said that one mark of a scientific theory is that it is falsifiable. At some level, it appears that Paul and Dawkins agree on one point: theism is a belief about the existence of God based upon empirical evidence which one can attempt to falsify. Any truth claim, such as the earth is round, can be countered by an argument with evidence. Arguing against a well-established fact like the shape of the earth eventually becomes an exercise in futility, but since it is possible to conceive of a way to falsify the spherical shape of the earth, it is considered a scientific idea. A strange person might want to defeat or suppress the knowledge that the earth is round for nefarious reasons and consequently come up with all sorts of creative lines of evidence to support a flat earth. The degree of an argument's weakness compared to a strong argument does not necessarily determine its shelf-life. Bad, weak arguments can sometimes hang on like a nasty cold.

When Charles Darwin published his *Origin of the Species*, many people, perhaps millions, eventually latched onto it as the ultimate knockdown, drag-out, theism defeater. Too bad for you Paul and Peter! So sorry to all you Christian martyrs who were ripped apart in Roman coliseums. Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas and Newton, we hate

to inform you that after all, you got it wrong. You did the best you could during your unenlightened period of history, but now evolutionary theory has lifted our understanding to new heights of wisdom. Darwin successfully showed us we need to put aside the idea that nature testifies of God's existence. He didn't make life. Life made itself.

Perhaps Darwin did not intentionally set out to dethrone God as Maker and Lord of creation.⁶⁶ A curious observer, intrepid traveler and prolific writer, he wrestled for years with the second Great Question. Where did species come from? How did humans get here? Living in Victorian England and even having at one time planned to enter the Christian ministry, Darwin knew the Genesis creation account. It canvassed the origin of *everything*. As a member of the English gentry, Darwin also knew the scientific stirrings in his own country and on the Continent. In the 18th century, scientific reductionism had become well established as the method for continually seeking deeper and deeper *natural* explanations for everything we observe in the cosmos. If scientific reductionism was good enough for the physicists Copernicus and Newton⁶⁷, then why not for the aspiring biologist Charles Darwin?

Just Not Necessary?

Materialists often remark that God is an unnecessary hypothesis. When Darwin published his *Origin of the Species*, many saw it as putting another and perhaps the final nail in God's coffin. Intentionally or not, he supplied the skeptics another piece of evidence that the God-hypothesis is not necessary. No longer did William Paley's watch on

⁶⁶ Perhaps Darwin would rebuke Dawkins for drawing theological conclusions from biology.

⁶⁷ Actually Newton was not a strict materialist reductionist. He thought that God must be in the equation as the ultimate explanation for the order of the universe.

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the beach require a watchmaker. No longer did Paul's cosmology cry out for a First Cause. With dense argumentation, Darwin made it not only seem plausible, but winsomely logical and almost certain that with enough time and matter, small and uninteresting chemical molecules can eventually become the cattle of the field and birds of the sky.

Paley's and Darwin's world in the 18th century saw a burst of technological advance that would propel humanity far ahead of all the previous millennia of human history. Plato would have surely marveled at the intricacies of a fine Swiss timepiece. The tiny gears, springs, catches, pins and posts had no parallel in the ancient world, in spite of their architectural craftsmanship. Perhaps this is why prior to the industrial revolution arguments for God's existence tended to be philosophical in nature. Furthermore, the ancient people had no idea of the living cell's intricate chemical machinery. Thus, Plato never could have said, "The incredible machinery of life exists in networks so complex and interdependent that they could not have arisen gradually or through random chance."⁶⁸ His argument was esoteric and leaned heavily upon subjective human experiences of goodness and beauty. The great 13th century Christian thinker Thomas Aquinas posed five arguments for the existence of God, only one of which could be rightly called a design argument. Like Plato, he had limited experience with complex machinery and no idea about the factory-like operations of proteins and DNA inside a living cell. He could not have given much thought to the difficulties involved in outlining a workable natural process for the origin of life and all organisms. Unlike Plato, Aquinas was a Christian, and therefore would have believed that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was the necessary first mover and the creator of life. But it is doubtful that Aquinas and many others before and after him would have felt unsettled by

⁶⁸ <https://www.epm.org/resources/2010/Oct/3/ten-major-flaws-evolution-revised/>.

someone showing how a “natural” physical process, not God, causes rain to fall. For Aquinas and Plato, the “God-hypothesis” was never childishly employed for every curious and mysterious physical phenomenon. “Oh, look! The water in that geyser is boiling. God did it. And there, a rainbow is over the wheat field. That’s God too, doing another miracle. For that matter, the wheat grew up tall since last week. Amazing. Yet another direct act of God.” Though they lacked the scientific paradigms of later centuries, they, just as we, understood that nature proceeds according to certain physical laws with no need for supernatural intervention. Gravity pulls water droplets to the earth. Hail forms at a certain cold temperature. These laws are reliable and predictable.

Even Jesus pointed out the reliability of natural laws. He once remarked to the Pharisees that they knew how to predict weather by observing atmospheric activity. Ancient people understood that the material world is governed by laws that are predictable. The most important question they faced was not why nature behaves predictably but where the “whole show” came from. They were not interested in trying to use God as a hypothesis to plug up the gaps in their patchwork quilt of understanding. They were searching for the ultimate, transcendent source of the beauty, meaning, purpose and connectivity of the whole quilt.

If this is true, then comments like Dawkins on how Darwin allowed him to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist become little more than a confession of subjective existential angst. Let’s suppose that Darwin got his theory entirely right. Imagine that all modern living creatures descended from a primeval single-cell ancestor which lived about 3.5 billion years ago. This “simple” single-cell organism lived at the extreme root tip of a massive family tree. During the course of 3 billion years this family tree would branch out in millions of curious directions. The duck-billed platypus and charging white rhino would be distant cousins. Even if Darwin’s theory of common descent is a

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plain fact of natural history it has no more to say about the existence or non-existence of God than the eruption of Mt. St. Helens volcano in 1980. It is as irrelevant to the argument about God's existence as the Pharisee's ability to predict the weather.

Does Darwin Falsify Theism?

How disappointing! Darwin's theory of evolution has no more to say about God's existence than any other mundane explanation of natural phenomenon? So do we end this section right here? What's left to discuss? If Darwinism can say nothing more pertinent to God's existence than what coffee brewing techniques could say, then why bother? Perhaps we continue to bother because we have a niggling hunch that living things might yet have something important to tell us about the existence of God. Dawkins and his ilk may be wrong to hastily conclude that if Darwinism lives God dies. But here's a scary proposition almost too dangerous to speak out loud. What if Darwin was wrong? What if physics is impotent to create and diversify life?

Darwin released a firestorm of theological debate. Many of his ardent fans coopted his theory in their anti-theism arguments. If we are logically precise, we see that they could not use the theory of evolution to prove that God does not exist. But atheists could use Darwin's theory to attack the idea that the existence of life is nothing short of a miracle. They say that if God is not needed to explain the origin of life, then a) we have very little (or no) positive reason to believe he exists and b) why not just ignore the issue of God's existence altogether?

Imagine a criminal case in which there is only one suspect for a bank robbery. A Person of Interest, Mr. Smith, had allegedly lived near the bank years earlier and then moved away. Rumors said that he sold some of his farmland to the bank but complained they cheated him. No one had seen him for years, but some former neighbors claimed that his overgrown yard and decaying house often made them nervous.

One neighbor reported that he had seen a woman he thought was Mr. Smith's daughter or niece snooping around the bank early one morning a couple of weeks earlier. With no other evidence for a different suspect, the mysterious Mr. Smith was the only explanation for the missing stacks of Benjamins. The Mr. Smith-hypothesis was compelling, until a detective makes a surprising discovery. He discovered that a homeless woman had fallen asleep on a grate outside the bank the night before the robbery. During a heavy rainfall the drainage grate suddenly worked loose allowing the woman to fall into an underground entrance to the bank vault. Other evidence mounted to convince the jury that the homeless woman had helped herself to some cash and then left the same way she came in. If someone else robbed the bank, then Mr. Smith was an unnecessary hypothesis.

Darwinism can only speak about the best scientific explanation for the origins of 8 billion human beings in all their racial and cultural diversity and offer no conclusions about God's existence. In Darwin's world God did not literally form man out of dust and woman out of man's side. But there is no logical objection to compatibility between theism and Darwin's world as he envisioned it. If someone feels they need Darwinian evolution to be false in order to believe in God, it may be difficult for them to picture a world where God used Darwinism as his means of creating the living world. On the other side of the argument stand atheists who depend upon Darwinism as a sure defeater for theism. They would rather not entertain the idea that God could have used any way he wanted to create the world. Darwinian Theory says too little about the ultimate source of life to make a believer unhappy or an unbeliever happy. Perhaps God used evolution to produce the myriad of species or perhaps he didn't. If God indeed created the world? What way did he do it?



Chapter 5

The Ancient Clock

The Subject Just Won't Rest

We see that Darwin's theory of evolution, whatever the varied ways it is speculated to have happened, can at most imply that God did not intervene in extraordinary, miraculous means to produce life and cannot directly speak about God's non-existence. Theistic Evolutionists (Theistic Creationists) take this position. Famous Christian apologist C.S. Lewis recognized this fact. He wrote,

We must sharply distinguish between Evolution as a biological theorem and popular Evolutionism or Developmentalism which is certainly a Myth. [...] To the biologist Evolution [...] covers more of the facts than any other hypothesis at present on the market and is therefore to be accepted unless, or until, some new supposal can be shown to cover still more facts with even fewer assumptions. [...] It makes no cosmic statements, no metaphysical statements, no

eschatological statements.⁶⁹

During a university panel discussion on the origins of life and humanity I presented some of these ideas and took audience questions. A bright graduate student from India asked, “Do you judge Darwin’s theory of evolution based on scientific or theological reasons?” That was easy. I use scientific methods to evaluate how heat and light affect the growth of bacteria in a petri plate. Why not also evaluate Darwin’s theory of evolution scientifically?

To Be or Not to Be?

At the very beginning of all things did God ask himself, “to be or not to be?” Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning, God...” God wouldn’t have pondered his own essentialness since he is eternal, but according to Genesis, our immense cosmos of time and space *was not* and then *was*. Contrary to some proposed eternal-universe models, Genesis and modern astrophysics point to a universe finite in time and space. This cosmological model strongly suggests the existence of God. Robert Jastrow wrote,

For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance, he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.⁷⁰

Leibniz wondered why there something rather than nothing. Can we suggest that God made a decision between being and non-being? Did he ponder within his limitless wisdom, should the universe, living

⁶⁹ Lewis, C.S. “The Funeral of a Great Myth.” *Christian Reflections*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967, p. 85.

⁷⁰ Jastrow, Robert, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p 116.

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creatures and human beings, “be or not be?” This was the most fundamental question.

We know the answer...*being*. The Apostle Peter hinted about this initial divine act of calling the universe into being. He wrote,

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water.⁷¹

Interestingly, this text shows a progression from something immaterial—*word of God*—to the material heavens, earth and water.

When thinking about the beginning of time and space, scientists talk about the *singularity*. The singularity is a non-repeatable event that occurred in the past. It had no physical cause, since nothing physical existed prior to it.

We must emphasize a very important point here. Human languages are designed to work within time and space. We are severely restricted in how we can speak accurately about the singularity. To be accurate in our conversation about time and non-time, we should not use any prepositions. It is inaccurate to say “God existed before, outside of, over, under or beyond time.” It is not even proper to say “When time did not exist.” That makes no more sense than saying “the time when time did not exist.” Time came into existence with the universe. The current finite-universe model means absolute non-being (true nothingness) and “then” the birth of being. Communicating about absolute nothing is exasperating. We should not imagine absolute nothingness as simply empty space. Nothingness meant *no* space and

⁷¹ 2 Pet 3:5.

no time. Using the language of nothingness creates a linguistic category void of all meaning. Nothing has no meaning and no existence.

Pop physicist-atheist Lawrence Krauss has opted for a different model of nothing. Stephen Hawking also was willing to traverse a path of linguistic compromise. The Great Singularity in the distant past implies a “prior” nothingness, but when one starts talking about a universe-sized singularity arising in the finite past from absolute nothingness, one faces the startling implication that a) absolute nothingness becoming something is a logical and physical absurdity and therefore impossible, and b) theism becomes a strong logical explanation for how the singularity could have both occurred “out of nothing” while at the same time had a first cause. Finding the theistic implications of Big Bang cosmology undesirable, some scientists have proposed a multiverse hypothesis, quantum energy fields, oscillating universes and an eternal universe. The hypotheses all attempt in some form or another to provide a natural/physical cause for the universe and shut the door on the necessity of a metaphysical cause. But Borde, Guth and Vilenkin authored a paper in 2003 that brings everyone back to the painful truth.⁷² The universe mysteriously and inexplicably came into existence at a definite, singular point in the past. The universe has a birthday and the book of Genesis says that God was there throwing the first party.

The Clock Starts Ticking

Aristotle said that nothing is what rocks dream about. Nothing is like death. No movement, no light, no heat, no form or shape, no beauty or ugliness, no smell, no sound...just nothing. In the beginning there was nothing...then the clock started ticking. Electrons and protons moved, photos shot out, heat flamed forth, forms and shapes molded, beauty emerged, and matter emitted smells and sounds. The present

⁷² Borde, Arvind, Alan H. Guth, and Alexander Vilenkin, “Inflationary Spacetimes Are Incomplete in Past Directions”, *Phys. Rev. Lett.* 90, 151301, 15 April 2003.

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became the past and the future became the present. The universe existed with finely tuned physical laws determining how matter and energy behaved. Had any one of dozens of physical parameters tilted ever so slightly to the right or left, atoms and molecules would have behaved much differently than they do and we would not exist. More than that, even the simplest organic life would not exist. Basic carbon building-blocks of life would never have formed had the physical world not balanced precariously on a razor-sharp edge of temperatures, strong and weak atomic forces, gravitational pull and dozens of other constraints. The universe seems weirdly fine-tuned for organic life on planet earth. What a lucky draw of the hand!

Assuming that modern science, though flawed and biased, is not completely useless or hopelessly bent on manufacturing data and theories that seek to defeat theism, we can sharpen our focus on the Second Great Question using modern scientific discoveries.⁷³ Space and digital tech have revealed to 21st century man a universe of awesome and terrifying immensity and beauty. We tremble before the sky, if we truly grasp what it means, more than ever in history. King David gazed into a pollution-free desert sky and humbly wrote,

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

⁷³ For the purpose of this book, we will give primary consideration to the mainstream scientific consensus about the earth's age. In this discussion of origins, we will leave aside the Young Earth Creationist (YEC) position, not because they may not have valid arguments about biblical and theological interpretations, but because they ultimately reject an objective scientific discussion when it conflicts with their theological commitment. If we cannot agree on the reliability of human reason and perception regardless of one's spiritual state, we are severely limited in our ability for constructive discourse. We read in Romans how dishonest people can suppress the truth with ulterior motives to protect themselves. Human error and even corruption can skew science as surely as any other field, but this does not necessarily mean that all non-Christian scientists (and all non-YEC Christians) are so darkened in their thinking that their research is uselessly distorted into propaganda.

the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son
of man that you care for him?⁷⁴

What should happen inside us when we study the high-resolution images of the moon Io or watch a video of the red Martian hills? Few of us pause to consider the immense size of the universe. The sunlight on our balcony is really nine minutes old. The moment we look at Jupiter in the nighttime sky we are looking 40 minutes into the past. When gazing into the Milky Way we are stepping into a time machine that shows us stars from 25,000 years ago. The stars in the Milky Way could explode today and we wouldn't know it for 25,000 years from now. Light traveling at 186,000 miles/second still requires thousands, if not millions, of years to cross the gulf between us and the extremities of the cosmos.

Astronomers tell us that the universe clock ticked for endlessly long eons before the earth was formed.⁷⁵ Baby stars aged, withered and died. Their hearts exploded and scattered rich elements across space. Some of the elements made their way to our solar system which exists in a remote and unusually quiet corner of the galaxy. Gravity spun

⁷⁴ Ps 8:3-4.

⁷⁵ The age of the earth is another hotly contested subject among theists. Was Bishop Ussher correct that the earth is 6000 years old? Was there an immense gap of time in Genesis chapter one when Satan raged upon the cosmos creating chaos and anarchy against the rulership of God? If the earth is 6000 years old why can't an unbiased observer come up with the physical evidence for this age? This puzzle hinges upon the Hebrew word *yom* (day). One problem for correct interpretation is that the 24-hour period of the modern day is not precisely the same as it was last century. As the earth rotates on its axis friction causes it to slow down. This adds 2.3 milliseconds to the length of the day every one hundred years. In any case, even if science proved beyond reasonable doubt that the universe is only 6000 years old, it would not be sufficient proof for the existence of God. Skeptics would still argue that we are the experiment of super-intelligent aliens or living in a computer matrix.

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around and around like a cake mixer whipping up a neat little, rocky planet, third from our sun. Our snug little home, protected from violently flying debris by the huge gas giants Jupiter and Saturn managed to capture and keep an oxygen-rich atmosphere and lots of H₂O. Modern planetary exploration confirms what every weary and thirsty desert nomad already knew. Fresh air and water are priceless.

Our cosmic clock kept ticking during which the earth's restless tectonic convulsions settled down, the atmosphere clarified and the seas rose and fell with the lunar tides. For long millennia the earth orbited the sun with its faithful sidekick the moon. If it were possible to travel faster than the speed of light to a star 3.5 billion light years away, we could train our telescopes back on our home planet and watch the drama of earth's first moments. But if we could travel faster than the speed of light, we could probably find a way to just travel back in time right here and not bother going across the universe! Nevertheless, it is interesting to think that somewhere in deep space is a light ray from earth that started its journey one morning on a day long, long forgotten.

How do we get back to the early earth? We cannot travel in a time machine and we have no old photos. We can however settle for something similar. We have rocks. Rocks dream of nothing, but they can tell stories. Firstly, geologists use radioactive decay rates to date rocks and they estimate the ages of geological layers. Rocks can also tell stories about the past in the form of fossils. Deceased organisms sometimes become trapped in sediment. Extended periods of heat and pressure in the sediment harden it into rock and along the way the imprint of the organism is left behind. Another kind of fossil material is formed when organisms with mineral shells accumulated in deep layers and eventually are transformed into rock. At other times the organism itself is compressed under rock and transformed into coal, gas or liquid petroleum. Fossil imprints, bones, footprints, stone layers and fuels give us a tangible connection to ancient natural history.

Our modern world rests—quite literally—upon the foundation of ancient creatures. Our global economy depends upon fossil fuels to generate electricity, power machines and supply materials for manufacture. In previous centuries burning coal generated steam for great turbines in ships and factories. Humanity owes an incalculable debt of thanks to the long-gone forests and animals whose decayed bodies we devour in our technological wonders. We know that our planet has been inhabited by immense populations of flora and fauna. In the geological time column, assessed by examination of thousands of meters of layer upon layer of rocks in the earth's crust, we see an interesting pattern. In the most ancient layers we find only single-cell organisms. Moving up the geological column we see the appearance of slightly more complex organisms. The thickest and oldest layers of fossils are composed of single-cell organisms. Then suddenly a layer appears in which a rich diversity of life explodes into existence. This period of rich growth is called the Cambrian period. During this time many novel life forms start to live whose basic body plans are still with us in modern animals. This is called the Cambrian Explosion, because many new creatures “exploded” suddenly on the scene, with no discernable ancestor.⁷⁶ Newer geological layers reveal more periods of time with fascinating and more complex creatures. *Jurassic Park* unforgettably brought to life a towering, toothy Tyrannosaurus Rex eager to crunch a juicy Triceratops or a jeep full of humans. These great creatures are estimated to have lived about 200 million years ago. Scientists still debate why they went extinct. Interestingly, just two hundred years ago when the silverback gorillas of the Congo remained unknown to Europeans, naturalists could not decisively say that dinosaurs no longer haunted the dark corners of the mysterious planet.

⁷⁶ Darwin's theory of evolution cannot explain the sudden appearance of an organism with no ancestor. In his theory all organisms must have evolved from a previous organism. For example, he says that a fish's fins could slowly, slowly evolve into legs over countless generations. But he would call it an impossible miracle for a new kind of organism with no ancestors to suddenly appear with legs.

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Today, with a sigh of sadness, we know that dinosaurs remain alive only on Hollywood sets and in vivid childhood imaginations. Once extinct, their absence cleared the planet's biospheres for an entirely new and dominant kind of animal. The Cretaceous period was marked with dozens of new mammal species scurrying, fussing, and reproducing on every continent but Antarctica. After these, ancestral horses, dogs, cats, whales and monkeys appeared in the fossil record. Assorted primate fossils have turned up in Africa, Europe and Asia. With only very scant fossil evidence, paleontologists attempt to construct an evolutionary family tree for humans. The earliest fossils for *Homo sapiens* turn up around 200,000 years ago according to current scientific reckoning.

In the 1800s Darwin knew almost everything written here in this brief summary of the fossil record. The fossil record illustrates broadly gradual increases in several categories: 1. Complexity of organisms 2. Number of species 3. Brain to body size ratio and intelligence of organisms.

Does modern biology provide examples of observable increases in organism complexity, number of species and intelligence?⁷⁷ Darwin had a ready answer. Animal breeding. Scottish sheep breeders well knew how to select animals according to the kind of wool and body size they wanted. From the offspring of one or a few breeding pairs, a good sheep breeder could select and breed again and again to achieve impressive results in the length, texture, durability and comfort of wool

⁷⁷ In spite of Darwin's answer, modern biology shows the opposite trend. No species is observed to advance in complexity but rather shows signs of genetic degradation as time passes. Species are going extinct rapidly with practically no new species emerging (dog breeds are not new species). Intelligence is not increasing among organisms. The scientific data shows that species tend toward a stubborn stasis in morphology and behavior. The fossil data supports this trend, showing that species can exist for allegedly millions of years, appearing suddenly and then disappearing with little or no change.

from different breeds. Dogs provide a similar example. Starting with an ancient wolf-like dog ancestor, breeders have selected offspring in breeding projects that have produced 350+ dog breeds. In a short period of a few centuries, breeders have caused the dog to increase kinds of faces, snouts, fur, personalities, behaviors and perhaps even increase in intelligence. They did this using only ordinary methods of mating male and female dogs. No magic. No miracles. No invasive medical technology. The humble breeders let nature take its course with just a little help here and there to push things in a certain direction.

A proto-horse, proto-dog or proto-sheep breeding pair can demonstrably produce an increasingly wide variety of offspring. Shetland ponies and Belgian horses, Great Danes and Tea-cup Poodles, Angora and Labradors. If this can happen over a few decades or centuries, what could millions of years do? It only took a few hundred generations for a wild dog's grandchild to wind up on Grandma's lap as a fluffy Shih Tzu in a pink bow. Is it too much to suggest that over millions of years a primeval fish in an ancient sea could become your neighbor mowing his lawn?

Turning Back the Clock

The science of forensics specializes in attempts to turn back the clock of time. Time does not stop for a crime. If only time would freeze the moment someone breaks the law immobilizing them in the act of wrong-doing. Even better, what if they were frozen a nanosecond before they did their violent act? Law enforcement would simply need to walk in and arrest the perpetrator and save the victim. It's the kind of stuff that makes for mind-bending sci-fi movies.

Video cameras are the modern equivalent of fossilization. The camera can capture evidence sufficient to indict a criminal of robbing a convenience store. The digital image and the fossilized image both turn back the clock of time to a specific moment where we can observe the event. Fossilization can freeze a Velociraptor caught in the very

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act of devouring a Protoceratops.⁷⁸ Radiometric dating⁷⁹ and geological analysis can place the fossilized organism in a specific time frame. The Burgess Shale in Canada contains a wealth of fascinating fossil species from the Cambrian period. All of them have gone extinct but they leave us with an amazing record of the history of life.

Imagine a world with no fossils? Here's a thought experiment. In our fossil-less world there are no trilobites with their little eyes popping out at us. There are no preserved imprints of ancient ferns with little fronds elegantly curling. There would be no Archaeopteryx imprinted in a muddy layer, revealing its delicate feathers, wings and arms. A barren fossil field produces no Brontosaurus leg-bones taller than a man, no raptor claws to terrify teenagers at the movies, no prehistoric sharks large enough to swallow a car, no hefty Neanderthal jawbones that leave us wondering if we would be comfortable sitting next to a Neanderthal family at a pizza joint. Worse yet, we would have no coal, no gas, no petrol, no plastic, no rubber, no industry, and otherwise very little technology. With what would we seal the wooden hulls of our little hand-built ships? Life would look much different.

Fossils give us nearly 100% of the information we have about the history of life on earth. It is practically inconceivable that any future genetic breakthroughs could in any way tell us that trilobites ever lived. DNA could not tell us they lived and we would have absolutely zero resources to envision what they looked like. The same is true for the iconic Tyrannosaurus Rex and Archaeopteryx. It does not mean of course that in our imaginary fossil-less world they did not exist, but it means that we would have no possible way of ever knowing. Genetic dating can compare the DNA of living organisms, for example a

⁷⁸ http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_8596000/8596568.stm.

⁷⁹ Carbon-14 dating can only be used up to 50000 years back in time. Radiometric dating can be used to measure the age of rock billions of years old.

chimpanzee and a human, to calculate when their last common ancestor may have lived. But so far at least, genetic studies offer no promise of ever giving the kind of detailed information about the existence and appearance of an ancient organism that we can find in the most common fossil.

Our thought-experiment demonstrates how essential and vital paleontology is to turning back the clock in our search for the origin of life and species. Understanding the importance of fossils in the search for origins means that we are approaching ground zero in this Second Great Question that resists certainty.



Chapter 6

Ground Zero

A world without a single fossilized bone shard or even half of a shell-print would be very weird and disappointingly boring. Paleontology would never have become a scientific discipline and all those little plastic dinosaurs that entertain children for hours of imaginative play would vanish. Not only would we have no way to know that a Tyrannosaurus Rex, Triceratops, and Brontosaurus ever existed, but we would have no plastic to mold their toy figurines. Most of us live unaware of how closely our lives are intertwined with fossils. Our thought-experiment should sober us deeply, to the point of taking several moments of silent reflection and gratitude for all those miles of layered geological rock and combustible gas, oil and coal.

We give thanks for fossils, but there is something even more important to be learned here. Perhaps it should just be stated abruptly and frankly. The fossil record is *not* Darwin's friend. Though not chosen intentionally as a pun, "Ground Zero" works quite nicely to express the fundamental problem with Darwinism's entire intellectual

enterprise. There are a great many zeros in the ground.

The Older Darwin

A generation before the publication of the *Origin of the Species*, Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, had become a renowned author and personality among the cultured elite. An articulate and intelligent atheist, he toyed with naturalistic origin-of-life scenarios. In one of Erasmus' poems we find wording eerily similar to a quote from Charles Darwin decades later. Circa 1800, the elder Darwin penned,

Organic Life beneath the shoreless waves
Was born and nurs'd in Ocean's pearly caves;
First forms minute, unseen by spheric glass
Move on the mud, or pierce the watery mass;
These successive generations bloom.
New powers acquire, and larger limbs assume;⁸⁰

In 1871 Charles Darwin wrote a letter stating,

... It is often said that all the conditions for the first production of a living organism are now present, which could ever have been present.

But if (and oh what a big if) we could conceive in some warm little pond with all sorts of ammonia and phosphoric salts, - light, heat, electricity &c. present, that a protein compound was chemically formed, ready to undergo still more complex changes, at the present

⁸⁰ Quoted in *Taking Leave of Darwin*, Neil Thomas, 2022

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day such matter wd be instantly devoured, or absorbed, which would not have been the case before living creatures were formed.⁸¹

What was the status of paleontology in 1800 as Erasmus Darwin's life drew to an end? People had known about fossils at least a hundred years before then. Robert Plot discovered a dinosaur bone in 1677, generating great curiosity. But Erasmus did not pen his epic poem *The Temple of Nature* in a laboratory for a peer-reviewed scientific journal. He allowed his unfettered imagination to roam about ancient shores with little or no physical evidence. This raises the question, how much did Charles Darwin walk in his grandfather's steps in constructing a theory from speculation instead of research?

I am no paleontologist, but even as a curious teenager I had a satisfying collection of fossils scavenged from Mississippi River gravel, old railroad beds and washed-out roadsides. Petrified wood, shell imprints, crinoids, trilobites, and corals portrayed past ecosystems that may or may not have resembled modern ones. My family's well-worn set of encyclopedias offered extravagant artistic renderings of the bizarre creatures that lived during various geological periods. I did not need an artist to show me that a trilobite and crinoid lacked something in versatility and intelligence that one would see in a field mouse.

Using the crudest set of terms possible, we can say that over the eons of earth's history, the fossil record gives evidence that primitive life forms lived in the earliest days of the earth and complex organisms existed in more recent periods. But it is incorrect that the fossil record shows a seamless evolution of life from simple to complex as Darwin theorized.

Remember our friend Mr. Smith and the bank robbery? What if a

⁸¹ <https://www.age-of-the-sage.org/darwin-quotes/warm-little-pond.html>.

witness turns up and testifies under oath that he had coffee with Mr. Smith at a café next to the bank shortly before it closed. What if it was proved that Mr. Smith was in town close to the bank hours before the robbery? Wouldn't this fit exactly what one would expect if he was guilty? If he had robbed the bank, we could safely conclude that he had physically been in the same town that day. But proving that he was at a nearby café that afternoon does not prove he robbed the bank. In the same way, finding some general compatibility between the fossil record and the theory of evolution does not give confidence that Darwin's theory of common descent is true. That is called jumping to conclusions and is not how science works.

Here is another good example of jumping to conclusions. In 2015, *Time* magazine published the story, "Winged Dinosaur, Ancestor of Velociraptor, Is Discovered" saying,

The creature, which measures 6 ft., 6 in. long, was well preserved in limestone in northeast China about 125 million years ago. It is an ancestor of the velociraptor, and is believed to be a precursor to the true bird, since this species was too large for its wings to support flight.⁸²

This paragraph moves from reporting quantitative data to making unverified speculations. Measuring the fossilized creature should be easy enough. Dating the fossil to 125 million years depends upon radiometric techniques that unfortunately have no absolute control, since we don't have any objects that we can independently prove are 125 million years old. Radiometric dating is therefore potentially imprecise. But the last claim—and the attention grabbing headline—is without any scientific evidence. DNA analysis can reliably connect you to a distant cousin but there is no such genetic technique available

⁸² <https://time.com/3962406/dinosaur-velociraptor-wings-feathers/>.

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to show any familial relationship between the Zhenyuanlong and the Velociraptor. For that matter we have no Zhenyuanlong or Velociraptor DNA. As with much of Darwinism, the conclusions of this *Time* article are supported not by data but by a presupposition: evolution must be true, so one dinosaur species must have evolved from a previous one and these two species seem to share some important things in common so one must be the ancestor of the other.⁸³ The writer is just reporting what the scientists are saying, without providing any other evidence. But who cares anyway since it all happened hundreds of millions of years ago? Is there any real ethical problem playing loosely with the facts?

For many scientists the dearth of evidence hardly justifies throwing Darwin under the bus. Just as Mr. Smith's presence near the bank suggests that it's physically *possible* he could be a crime suspect, the fossil record of simple to complex life on earth suggests that it's *possible* Darwin's theory of evolution might be true. But if he is truly guilty of bank robbery, Mr. Smith must be tried and convicted on more compelling evidence than just having coffee near the bank on the day of the robbery. A valid theory of evolution should produce much more evidence than only fossils of simple organisms and fossils of complex organisms appearing abruptly across a great period of time recorded in the geological layers. What more is needed?

Darwin's Fossil Problem

This is no secret. Darwin had a big problem. He knew it. Others knew it. People today know it. An evolutionary biologist can line up

⁸³ Underneath this presupposition is another more fundamental presupposition: there is no God, so the only explanation for life must be Darwinian evolution. For the committed atheist, Darwinism must be true since there is no alternative, regardless of the spotty evidence. A less popular materialistic theory is that aliens created life on earth: <https://evolutionnews.org/2021/04/meyer-is-the-designer-an-alien-or-god/>

fossils of an ancient microbe, trilobite, palm frond, fish and amphibian but this no more establishes their relationship to one another than lining up a wooden scooter, unicycle, Model-T, Studebaker, Mustang and Martian rover. The chronology of their appearance, their likenesses and differences and their unique functions all make for fun speculations, but the side-by-side comparison proves only that they existed and little else about them. A good engineer could study the shape of the cars' wheels and body designs in order to improve function, but without additional background information, he or she would be hard pressed to do anything but guess as to why the Model-T was black and the Porsche red (and why the Mustang was the coolest car ever invented!) Lining up fossils by age and shape, even ones that seem to show a remarkable progression from one species to another, has little empirical value.

Here's another thought-experiment. Suppose we had an ideal paleontological record of the last 3.5 billion years, populated by sample organisms from every two thousand years.⁸⁴ This would give us an almost seamless chain of life from the earliest microbes to us. Would it prove Darwin's theory? No. The best it could do is give it greater plausibility. It can persuade, never prove. We would still be left with questions. In our ideal fossil record we might see stages of alleged evolution of whale from land mammal to marine. But could stone imprints ever prove that a flipperless land whale birthed a baby land whale with half-flippers who went on to become the father of modern whales? Such a find would be a fantastic addition to paleontology, but how could anyone confidently say that the baby with half-flippers would not have helplessly flopped around, died in the jaws of a predators and thus never left any progeny? Someone might answer that such a missing link did survive and produce offspring, since we have whales in the fossil record, but that would be begging the

⁸⁴ This would provide us with 1.75 million consecutive samples.

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question.

Darwin's problem is worse than that. The real problem is not that the fossil record can only persuade if it was ideal. The troubling problem is that since Darwin's day the fossil record has consistently told a story that contradicts him. Darwin himself admitted this fact. "Why does not every collection of fossil remains afford plain evidence of the gradation and mutation of the forms of life?"⁸⁵

Darwin hoped (maybe even prayed in moments of weakness) for future breakthroughs in paleontology. The fossil record could never provide absolute certainty for his theory, but it certainly could raise serious doubts. The key concept here is *transitional forms*. A land-based whale ancestor would have to go through *radical* re-engineering to become a humpback whale sailing the oceans blue. Just imagine what a child does to a playdough house on its way to becoming a snake. If someone took a snapshot of the playdough each second between being a house and becoming a snake, the result would be dozens (or hundreds) of transitional forms, neither house nor snake. Almost two centuries after Darwin, the fossil record still gives Darwinists little comfort. Attempting to describe the kind of step-by-step adaptation that would need to occur for a land-based whale ancestor to become a humpback whale would require a separate book of high-level engineering. Variation in sheep wool and dog snouts can be surprising, interesting and comfortably cute. On the other hand, morphing a nose into an aquatic air-hole and legs into a dynamic tail is revolutionary. In domestic animal breeding the "apple never falls far from the tree," meaning that a dog is still a dog and a sheep a sheep. But a humpback whale is not a large pig who weirdly had a baby with plastic floaties.

Do the generations of offspring between an ancient wolf and a modern Pug qualify as transitional forms? What has transitioned? The nose

⁸⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2008/feb/09/darwin.recapitulation>.

is still in front of the snout, the claws and paws still scratch the dirt, the tail still wags ridiculously. Getting from ancient dog to pet Poodle requires almost no fundamental changes. It is of little value to speak of transitional forms inside of genus.

Suppose whales evolved from a large pig-like land animal some 200 million years ago. Ancient whale ancestor A, snuffled and slogged around the coastlines. Moving forward through the generations of offspring from A to modern whales W would require huge changes. How many transitional forms would be needed? Hundreds, thousands? Most evolutionary biologists rule out the idea of saltation's "fortunate monster" in which a parent couple birth an organism freakishly different from themselves. For example a goldfish couple would not birth a finless eel that slithers out of the fishbowl! Richard Dawkins writes, "Do good by stealth. A key feature of evolution is its gradualness."⁸⁶

From an engineering point of view, if we take evolutionary gradualism as the operating paradigm, we can see that it's not enough to even have thousands of generations of slight, genetically guided body modifications necessary to re-morph ancient land-whale A into modern whale W. Unlike playdough, this is not child's play. It involves massive skeletal changes, highly complex biochemical innovation and many other reproductive and behavioral modifications. To say this is a transition from A to W or from 1.0 to 2.0 is highly misleading. It is a transition from point 1.0 to point 10000.0 or even more remotely, to point 100000000.0.

Another fact makes the fossil record even less friendly to evolutionary theory. In each point on the line from organism A to organism W there is no predictable length of time. Darwin knew better than that. If evolution had occurred, he knew that a specific life form that exists

⁸⁶ Dawkins, R., *River Out of Eden*, 1995, p. 83.

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between two other related forms might live in stasis for hundreds of generations (hundreds of thousands or millions of years possibly). Darwin believed that species could remain virtually unchanged for hundreds of thousands of years from generation to generation. In Darwin's hypothetical whale lineage, we could not only have thousands of transitional forms but each transitional form could have existed for hundreds of generations. If there had been 100,000 transitional forms and each had an average of 1000 generations, there could potentially be up to 1×10^8 transitional samples preserved in the fossil record of the evolution of the whale. Where are they?

And More Ambiguity?

This book is a scientific and theological study. If God exists and made the world, why would he give us certain Great Questions that resist certainty? This has sometimes been called the problem of the "hiddenness of God." Pascal tried to answer it saying that God knows a person's heart. If they are seeking him, he gives them light. If they aren't interested, he leaves them alone, like a gentleman giving his cranky neighbor a wide berth. Too much evidence for certainty might come across as pushy or compulsory. Is love still love that cannot go unaccepted? Pascal believed that for a person with an open heart, God does not hesitate to satisfy their intellect with compelling evidence for his existence. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans that God's existence is not a question of great uncertainty but one clear and open to everyone, so that all are without excuse. If someone finds theism hard to swallow, the problem is in them, not in the objective evidence. If it is true that God's existence goes without saying, then maybe one could say that God is a perfect gentleman. He allows people to freely and know and love him or ignore him and even suppress the knowledge of his existence.

In this section we are evaluating the second Great Question of origins. How did the first life and later Homo sapiens show up on the scene?

The answer is locked in the past. No one can go there and no living witnesses can answer. The fossil record is the only way to know the history of life. Like a family album, it can show evocative photos of long-lost loved ones. Without it we would have zero way of knowing what animals went extinct in the deep past. That knowledge would be locked from us forever.⁸⁷

Darwinists know the value of the fossil record. They routinely celebrate that it generally concords with the theory of evolution by showing the existence of primitive life 3.5 billion years ago followed by periods of gradually more complex life. But the celebration stutters and falters as the whole fossil record is assembled in the halls of academia. Darwin's hope (and prayer?) has not materialized in the discovery of vast numbers (meaning thousands or more) of transitional forms that must have existed were his theory true. Ground Zero means that instead of millions of necessary transitional forms seamlessly presented across billions of years the fossil record shows sudden bursts of new forms appearing with zero precedents. Zero. The number zero pops up over and over. Geological layers showing a million years or 10 million years contain zero transitional forms. In this case one might almost be persuaded to conclude that absence of evidence is evidence of absence.

The fact of long periods of zero transitional fossil forms significantly undermines the plausibility of Darwinism. On the other hand, Darwinists celebrate the fossil record of simple life forms gradually

⁸⁷ To be clear, many strange species may have lived in the earth's past about which we have no knowledge. The discovery of new species in the fossil record is the only means we have of identifying that they once lived. For example, perhaps there was a giant snake that flew from branch to branch. Only a fossil discovery could show that it existed in the past. Ironically, the discovery of new species in the fossil record usually work against the theory of evolution because they lack an ancestor, live in stasis for long period of time and exit suddenly with no visible offspring. Instead of supplying "the missing link" they open a new chain with more missing links.

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giving way to complex. In a broad sense, this gradualized pattern of simple to complex could be a strong argument for Darwinian evolution. If God made the world, why would he leave us with so many unresolved mysteries about our origin? This recalls a line from the cult-movie *Princess Bride*. “Disappointment, learn to live with it.”

There is No Evolution Debate!

Why so much uncertainty about origins? Is it wrong to suggest that the theory of evolution is anything but a settled fact of science? Is this entire second section of the book based on a wrong premise that the question of life’s origins resists certainty? Evolutionists regularly assert unwavering confidence in the Darwinism. *Psychology Today* published the article “Why Human Evolution Is a Fact”. They stated, “Despite religious controversy in the U.S., the science is settled.”⁸⁸ Aside from the problem that evolutionary theory lies outside the field of psychology, the writer wanders away from scientific data into pure speculation about the ancient past. Not to mention that there’s nothing less scientific than the saying, “the science is settled.”

Let’s suppose that in spite of the incomplete fossil record Darwin was correct that every living thing evolved from primordial microbes. Suppose Darwinian common descent is a fact as sure as gravity. If that is the case, then theists of all stripes should no more reject Darwin’s theory than they would reject Einstein’s theory of relativity. We could demote the question of life’s origin from one of the Great Questions that resists certainty to a lower status of an interesting question now put to rest. Like a court case that reaches a sound and just verdict, theists and non-theists alike should accept evolutionary theory with satisfaction and move on. If the theory of evolution is about as certain as any other scientific model, then only ideologues

⁸⁸ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-human-beast/201907/why-human-evolution-is-fact>.

would dissent, not motivated by scientific ideas but by religion or philosophy. In the view of the modern academy and secular society, these people could be tolerated but only if they keep to themselves and are never allowed in the public sphere.

There is an Evolution Debate!

Ideologies can cut two ways. Evolutionist can accuse theists of allowing their ideology to trump their science. They say that an allegiance to the traditional Christian teaching that God miraculously created a literal Adam and Eve as the first members of the human race will automatically exclude any evidence which suggests otherwise. Does the atheist have any similar presuppositions that filter their interpretations of the evidence?

Yes. This presupposition is called methodological naturalism. It views natural history as a seamless stream of purely natural causes and effects. God is ruled out *a priori*. The modern scientist presumes atheism before stepping into the lab. If that person happens to be a theist, they remove that “hat” and hang it up until they leave work. As one religious physicist quipped, if the experiment goes bad they don’t blame demons, but if it goes well they say a word of thanks to God. This is the world of Stephen Jay Gould with non-overlapping magisterium. The private religious world is completely existential (subjective) and the public world nature is purely material.

Here is how this plays out. A cell phone factory manager gathers all the parts and diagrams for assembling a smart phone. He places the parts in a series of bins so his employees can intelligently put them together. In the final step a worker inserts a charged battery and powers up the phone. If the manager is a devout Christian, she utters a prayer for her workers and the new phones. No one there expects God to directly assemble the parts into a phone in a Harry Potteresque magical motion. Each step of the cell phone construction and operation follows the laws of physics and can be broken down into a

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chain of cause and effect.

Shouldn't the origin of life have happened that way? "Well, duh," mutters the materialist, "How else would it have happened? Little green men from Mars?" Now that we mention it, this is oddly enough what some scientists have suggested. Crick theorized that perhaps aliens seeded the earth in the beginning to get life started. *Scientific American* reports,

Crick and Orgel proposed their Directed Panspermia theory at a conference on Communication with Extraterrestrial Intelligence, organized by Carl Sagan and held at the Byuraka Observatory in Soviet Armenia in 1971.⁸⁹

The notion of little green planet farmers, sowing seeds of new life and species does not fundamentally contradict methodological naturalism any more than saying Henry Ford invented the Model-T automobile. Like Ford, space aliens would still be subject to the same laws of physics and exist within time and space. The space alien theory does not mean certain atheists are willing to also consider the possibility that God is a necessary hypothesis, but it does introduce a very important concept. It says that the origin of life has some serious challenges and one solution is that it was intelligently designed.

The Power of Intelligence

The void left by billions of non-existent transitional fossils casts a long shadow of doubt over Darwin's theory of common descent. Why are so many necessary, incrementally different forms not there? Why are there so many zero data points in the ground? Did those "missing links" live or not? If they don't turn up in the fossil record we have no way of proving they ever existed in any place other than Darwin's

⁸⁹ <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/the-origins-of-directed-panspermia/>.

colorful imagination. Against all the dogmatic protestations of committed Darwinists, there is still a cloud of controversy swirling around their theory.

In addition to the fossil record is another problem that strikes very deeply in the heart of the Darwinian enterprise. As Crick understood, the origin of life and the appearance of millions of species is a fact that strains the explanatory power of physics. Fred Hoyle famously wrote,

A junkyard contains all the bits and pieces of a Boeing 747, dismembered and in disarray. A whirlwind happens to blow through the yard. What is the chance that after its passage a fully assembled 747, ready to fly, will be found standing there? So small as to be negligible, even if a tornado were to blow through enough junkyards to fill the whole Universe.⁹⁰

Darwinian proponents are hard-pressed to avoid the fact that randomness displays a debilitating lack of power to create even a small biological system.

More recently, David Gelernter rejected Darwinian Theory precisely because of the probabilities problem. He wrote,

It's not surprising that your chances of hitting a stable protein that performs some useful function, and might therefore play a part in evolution, are even smaller. Axe puts them at 1 in 10^{77} .

In other words: immense is so big, and tiny is so small, that neo-Darwinian evolution is—so far—a dead loss. Try to mutate your way from 150 links of gibberish to

⁹⁰ Hoyle, Fred, *The Intelligent Universe*, 1983, p 19.

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a working, useful protein and you are guaranteed to fail. Try it with ten mutations, a thousand, a million—you fail. The odds bury you. It can't be done.⁹¹

Michelangelo and King David

Michelangelo's statue of King David is one of the world's greatest art masterpieces. Anyone gazing at its imposing 17 ft. figure ought to be curious about its origin. From a scientific view, there are two basic categories of its origins: 1. What physical processes created the raw marble and, 2. What physical process shaped the marble into the magnificent sculpture of King David? Alongside the natural ingredients we have only one adequate cause to insert in the process of its formation:

Raw matter + time + energy + intelligent mind = King David's Sculpture.

In reference to biological systems this simple formulation—which any fifth-grader can comprehend—is problematic for PhD professors. Why? As Dawkins said, in spite of the appearance of design, biology is a science that must be explained by purely natural, unintelligent, non-teleological forces. For materialists, everything is the result of physical processes, even the chemistry of Michelangelo's brain. Thus, David's sculpture was determined not by a free mind but by physical cause and effect. As John Lennox, the popular Oxford mathematics professor likes to point out, the pure naturalist should never talk about their "mind" as though such a thing could exist distinct from the brain. In the closed universe of naturalistic materialism, the human body and brain evolved gradually over millions of years entirely from physical matter. The "mind" is therefore only a physical property of electro-chemical activity. Chemicals don't make decisions. Sodium (Na) and chloride (Cl) are two elements that react together in a violent explosion to form common table salt (NaCl). Those two elements will always

⁹¹ <https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/giving-up-darwin/>.

react according to the laws of physics. They do not have any capacity to evaluate whether or not you need more salt in your kitchen. Salt is an inevitable result of physical processes under certain conditions.

Scientific determinism would mean that our great artist Michelangelo sculpted King David not because he was a spiritual person who could make thoughtful decisions, but because the electro-chemicals in his brain acted according to physical laws to produce the sculpture. A determinist would write the formula this way.

Raw Matter + Time + Energy + Michelangelo's neurology = King David's Sculpture

Remember what rocks dream about? Nothing. Extrapolating from a chunk of radioactive uranium ore to the human brain helps illustrate what the materialists are saying about the mind. What's the chief difference between the brain and the radioactive rock? Brains dream. Rocks don't. The materialist says that otherwise the brain and the rock are essentially nothing more or less than physical matter and energy.

Ebenezer Scrooge helps explain this philosophy of doubt. Returning to his dark home on Christmas Eve, a tired and lonely Scrooge is confronted by an inexplicable apparition of his deceased partner Jacob Marley. Frightened by the chain-rattling ghost, Scrooge nevertheless recovers his wits enough to give a solid materialist answer.

You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!⁹²

Scrooge's formula for explaining the event looks like this.

Matter (his brain) + undigested cheese + neural energy = hallucination

⁹² Dickens, Charles, *A Christmas Carol*, 1843.

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Many people stop there and fail to see the far-reaching implications. If chemical reactions are responsible for a hallucination, why are they not responsible for all human behavior? Materialists Sam Harris and Jerry Coyne get this, to some degree. They think that in the same fundamental way gravitational forces cause ocean waves, electro-chemical forces cause human brain waves that direct behavior. Physical laws determine everything in the world of the pure naturalist. This is why Laplace wrote,

We may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future. An intellect which at a certain moment would know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed, if this intellect were also vast enough to submit these data to analysis, it would embrace in a single formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the tiniest atom; for such an intellect nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes.⁹³

If Laplace was correct, a super-mathematician would have been able to calculate exactly what physical conditions had to be present to produce the electro-chemical reaction in Michelangelo's brain that would move his hands to sculpt King David. The atheistic evolutionist claims that the artist is no more than physical energy and matter, acting on matter, to reorder matter. In a naturalistic world, mind, intelligence, self, and consciousness are all illusions inside an

⁹³ Laplace, Pierre Simon, "A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities", translated into English from the original French 6th ed. by Truscott, F.W. and Emory, F.L., Dover Publications (New York, 1951) p.4.

impersonal brain.

Evolutionary biologist Jerry Coyne says, “all matter and energy in the universe, including what’s in our brain, obey the laws of physics.”⁹⁴ So why do hard determinists like Coyne and Sam Harris bother to write books and do seminars to influence people to change the minds if naturalistic determinism is true? Supposedly our physical brains are subject to physical laws and will only follow a course of physical cause and effect. Physical objects pay no heed to good arguments and compelling evidence. Someone losing a billiard game can angrily curse the uncooperative balls but they, like the sleeping rock, will think nothing of it. Words cannot influence mindless matter.

Darwin understood that his theory could undermine the reliability of human reasoning. He worried that we couldn’t trust our own brains if they evolved from ancestral apes. If the brain is molecules and electrons moving about according to our diet and environment, then there is no “mind” to think rationally. Like religious zealots, Harris and Coyne seek converts for their way of thinking. If determinism is true, their converts are not persuaded by good arguments but only because their brain molecules made them move in a certain direction. If human thought is just the by-product of chemical reactions, then we all live under the tyranny of impersonal physical laws. Perhaps we can pity the determinists, if only because they sadly think they are trapped in a hopelessly unalterable course of events not of their own making.

In a world of deterministic physical laws where Michelangelo’s King David can be reduced to the product of chemical reactions, one might expect a renaissance of medieval magic potions. Do you desire the affection of the cute girl working in the next cubicle? Then try a love potion. Aspiring to high public office? Take a political potion that

⁹⁴ <http://theskepticalzone.com/wp/coynes-latest-defense-of-determinism-why-it-fails/>.

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guarantees you election. If you hanker for musical genius, take the recording artist potion. In the words of the evil Johann Schmidt in the film *Captain America*, “what others see as superstition, you and I know to be a science.” Getting your chemical cocktail just right might turn a young man or woman into the next Mozart, Gandhi or Einstein. The Hydra bad guy may be sci-fi, but the Nazis very much sought to use chemicals to create the perfect soldier. They drugged thousands of their troops with methamphetamine to enhance performance.⁹⁵ The drugs sharpened their focus, allowed them to go without sleep for days and numbed their moral inhibitions.

Bringing evil tyrants like Nazis into this discussion can mislead us. We might be tempted to think of the brains of the masses as electro-chemical computers that elite masterminds bend to their will. That misses the point. In the naturalist’s world, *no one* has a free mind. Every physical body and brain, from the smartest and most powerful to the weakest is helplessly swept about by physical forces. This worldview may lie behind the words of Inspector Javert in *Les Miserables*. He confidently declares that modern science tells us that people can’t change. If any change happens in a deterministic world, it is strictly the consequence of new physical resources inserted into the system. Brains are not an “I”, but an object made of molecules and transmitting electrical pulses. Humanity is an illusion that whitewashes a brutally impersonal cosmos. In Dawkins’ famous words,

In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom,

⁹⁵ <https://www.livescience.com/65788-world-war-ii-nazis-methamphetamines.html>.

no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.

C.S. Lewis puts it more poetically when describing Narnia before Aslan arrives, where it's "always winter and never Christmas."

In his book *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, philosopher Alvin Plantinga explained the predicament this line of thinking causes for Darwinism. If naturalism and Darwinism are true that everything is the result of physical laws, then we have almost no reason to trust our reason. Chemicals react in certain ways based on their physical properties. Sodium and chloride react to produce salt because of their atomic states. Their reaction says nothing true or false (information) about objective reality. The reactions in the brain aren't guided by laws of reason and logic. The outcomes of chemical processes are determined by physical laws, not abstract laws of logic. Furthermore, Plantinga argues that if evolution produced the human brain through a process of selecting the fittest offspring, the chances of an organism knowing the truthfulness or falseness of a particular claim is low or inscrutable. A dog may think its master is the only human in the world or not. The truthfulness of its thoughts don't bear on its ability to eat its food. If Plantinga is right that there's only a small probability evolution would produce reliable cognitive faculties, then how can we be sure of anything in the world Darwinism proposes?

Down at Ground Zero

Rummaging around in Ground Zero of fossils we've turned up a very troubling pattern. With a nicely preserved geological record of 3.5 billion years we can observe periods of increasingly greater complexity of living things, but we find shockingly few and at times zero pieces of evidence for the supposed transitional forms required by Darwin's theory of gradual evolution. Furthermore, probing the implications of methodological naturalism brings us to the conclusion that if Darwinian Theory is true, we lose our foundation for reliable

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reasoning. In fact, *we* don't exist; rather, the brain achieves mental states as a result of cause and effect chemical reactions. Sodium and chloride make salt. Freezing temperatures and dew make lovely crystals. In a purely physical world, far more complex but nevertheless completely natural brain reactions make sculptures of King David. If the fossils aren't a friend of Darwinism and if our thoughts are no more than fabulous chemical reactions, how can one rationally hold to Darwin's theory of evolution?



Chapter 7

The Missing Link

This book proposes that every human being must consider why, assuming his existence and good nature, would God give us three great questions that resist certainty. Why ambiguity? Why uncertainty? This is a search for truth. In this section we are considering the question of origins. Why is there enough evidence of Darwinian evolution to convince many people while on the opposite side many other people have strong reasons to be skeptical? Darwin's theory is quickly approaching its 200th birthday. In mainstream science and public education teachers take Darwinism for granted. Couldn't God have given us a different record of history, so that Darwinism would be rationally impossible to defend? For example, he could have placed whale fossils in the oldest geologic strata. He could have created humans before primates. That would be hard to explain even for the most imaginative evolutionist! He could have mixed giraffe skeletons with ancient prokaryotic organisms. He could have made it more obvious in the fossil record that species existed independently with no common descent. As it is, there are sufficient lines of evidence for

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firm Darwinian believers to feel satisfied—yet enough deficiencies for dissenters to make their case. What an odd situation! Hardly any other scientific theory is still so highly contested. Is this a forewarning of a Kuhnian paradigm shift, when the scientific community will finally reach a point of tension that erupts with a new scientific theory of origins?

Is Darwinism so highly contested because it has been used to attack belief in God? If it is true, then atheists feel justified in tossing out God the creator. If false, the theists feel justified in positing a creator. Do people over-invest it with non-scientific ramifications and then stand to lose too much if it were proven true or false? If Darwinism collapsed tomorrow, what difference would it really make for the atheists, deists and agnostics? Surely their intellectual fire-power and creativity could come up with some other naturalistic explanation for the origin of life and species. Spontaneous generation might even come back into vogue. Since many people already believe the universe popped into existence from nothing, or almost nothing, and that life first arose in the primeval oceans against all odds, it is just a few small steps to conjure up a different materialistic theory of the origin of living things without reference to Darwin. Therefore, the ruthlessly honest theist must surely recognize that any attempt to defeat atheism by defeating Darwinism is futile. If someone discovers Noah's ark next week in a melting Ararat glacier and the week afterwards physicists make the shocking discovery that light may have traveled much faster in the past than it appears to now, a viable young earth theory would not convince a strict materialist that God did it. They would struggle with the data but in the end propose some kind of natural explanation. They might appeal to super-genius aliens who created our universe as an experiment or video game, or to a lucky multiverse generator that popped out our universe like a pig popping out piglets.

The question of evolution is open for everyone to critique. Does the

scientific data support Darwin's theory of evolution or does it point to other explanations for the origin of life and every living thing? Where does the evidence lead? Why do honest scientists of all backgrounds struggle to understand the data? Is evolutionary theory difficult to prove even if it's true? Why is the data so jumbled and confusing? Did God intentionally make the evidence of fossils, genetics and homologies seem so powerfully persuasive to some and so uncertain to others? Do scientists accept or reject evolutionary theory simply as a result of their prior biases? Some perhaps, but other scientists would love to win a place of renown in history by upturning one of the most contentious theories of the past two hundred years. If Darwin's theory of random mutation and natural selection is not true, wouldn't honest scientists (atheists and theists alike) eagerly try to establish a better theory? In the same way, if it is true, wouldn't honest scientists of all stripes gladly embrace it, regardless of their personal religious beliefs? Yet there are still many scientists (and millions of thoughtful non-scientists) who have serious reservations about the standard theory of common descent. They question evolutionary theory because of logical and scientific reasons, not theological. Could this imply that many atheistic scientists have a deeper loyalty to their ideology than they are willing to admit? They hang onto Darwinism because they *want* it to be true. The atheist then ironically turns upon the believer and asks, "Aren't you denying Darwinism because you *don't* want it to be true?"

In the Doldrums

The doldrums refers to the situation when old sailing-ships got caught off the coast of Brazil in a zone of little wind. No wind meant no movement. The sailors sat and sweated and prayed for wind. The Great Question of the origin of life and species seems eerily like the doldrums. Evolutionists tout the evidence of their DNA clocks, homologies and the fossil record. Creation advocates of all stripes present DNA information encoding, elaborate cellular factories and

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the fossil record. Like two opposite winds of equal strength, they immobilize the sailing ship. Is there anything to break us free from the doldrums to have assurance about the real origin of life and organisms? Are we stuck in this place for perpetuity? Why can't we find something to break the deadlock?

Is it too ambitious to hope for a breakthrough from the doldrums? James Tour says that the more we learn about the cell the farther away the goal moves from explaining the origin of life and species. Is it no more realistic to expect an answer about life's origin than thinking we will ever learn what happened before the Big Bang? Is this a fool's errand? Is the desire to find Stephen Hawking's "Theory of Everything" as fanciful as Frodo's quest to destroy the Ring of Power? Have we returned to the words of the Princess Bride's Man in Black? Get used to disappointment.

Darwinism's Expiration Date?

Why should an atheist want to use Darwinism to buttress his or her materialistic worldview? Why should an atheist care about any evidence that God does not exist, since all evidence is subject to human bias? Humans have an extraordinary capacity for confirmation bias. In his typically cleverly winsome way, C.S. Lewis illustrated this with his Narnian dwarves. Confronted with an undesirable reality, the dwarves nevertheless see what they want to see. After setting them free, Aslan tells them they can get up and walk about in the sunshine but in their imagination all they can see is a dirty stable.

“Starting a new lie! Trying to make us believe we're none of us shut up, and it ain't dark, and heaven knows what,” the dwarfs said.⁹⁶

Suppose indisputable DNA evidence surfaces for the existence of an

⁹⁶ Lewis, C.S., *The Last Battle*, 1956.

aboriginal male and female couple who sired the entire modern human race. The *New York Times* and the *BBC* blare out, “Biblical Adam and Eve Indeed Our First Ancestors.” Talk shows and YouTube channels chatter endlessly about the implications that all humans share an original set of parents. Science experts are called upon to explain exactly how this discovery was made and verified. Bible scholars and theologians sit in front of microphones and discuss how our first parents might have behaved. Would this change anyone’s mind? Would the unbelievers fall on their knees and weep in repentance? Probably not. They might toss out Darwinism, but they would not toss out their atheism. Modernity takes atheism as a basic fact. They do not use Darwinism to prove their atheism. They use their atheism to prove Darwinism: “There is no God (or gods) so the only way to explain life is through natural processes.”

Atheism → Materialism → Darwinian Theory that life and all species including humans arose from purely natural physical causes however improbable

Darwinism is currently the pet materialistic theory of modernity. But if enough empirical data someday accumulates to defeat Darwinism another atheistic theory will take its place. No matter what evidence surfaces in the future atheists will always say that it happened randomly without the help of anything supernatural. They will always interpret the data according to their bias.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Consider Stephen Jay Gould. He rejected standard Darwinian theory of gradual, minor modifications. Recognizing the fossil record tells a different story, he proposed Punctuated Equilibrium. This theory said that new species appeared abruptly and remained unchanged for long eons. But this did not persuade him that God created life forms. He remained an atheist and interpreted the data within his worldview. He used atheism—not evidence—to prove his theory that life appeared naturally.

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Honest Inquisitiveness

An interesting little New Testament text says, “test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”⁹⁸ Since the beginning of the church, honest Christians were obliged to think critically, ask hard questions, search and examine. This method is based upon the law of non-contradiction: if one thing is found to be true the opposite is therefore false. If $2 + 2 = 4$ then it is false that $2 + 2 > 4$. We can discover the truth by eliminating what is false. Honest people of any theistic system or none should be interested in the truth. An atheist and a theist should mutually want to know the truth of our origins from the first little spark of life under the soft rays of the morning sun to the first cries of a newborn baby. Just as it is difficult to see how any scientific discovery could solidly defeat atheism (someone will always come up with a plausible naturalistic explanation), it is difficult to see how any scientific discovery could prove theism. This odd predicament is exactly the motivation for this book. If God exists, shouldn't we be able to search for the origin of life to show that he is the source? It's as though the Great Question of life's origins has a built-in God-indicator that arouses something very deep in our human consciousness. Almost no one can talk about life origins without automatically starting to ponder the question of a creator. The otherwise unbiased atheist gets excited about perceived materialist implications of evolutionary biology and the theist sees biology as one of the main arenas of argument for God's existence.

Teetering in the Middle

Much of this book so far has taken us to a precariously balanced point between several choices. Two Christian thinkers, the Apostle Paul and Blaise Pascal seem to be very close to one another but ever so slightly removed in their understanding of evidence for God. Do atheists have enough evidence of God but willfully deny and distort it or do

⁹⁸ 1 Thess 5:21-22.

they harden their heart so they can't see it? Paul says that the atheist takes up active resistance against the evidence for God though he knows it's true and Pascal says that the disinterested (rebellious) atheist is allowed to remain in comfortable, passive ignorance.

Another teetering place is between evidence for and against Darwinism. In 2013 *The New York Times* reported,

In fact, evolution is probably the most thoroughly examined and abundantly supported idea in all of science. But arguments about teaching it rage on.⁹⁹

In spite of this boast, the theory of evolution is not settled science, not by any means. The evidence on both sides has accumulated over 150 years since the publication of the *Origin of Species* and deserves serious consideration. Twenty-first century technology has introduced new doubts about Darwinism as research into the cell reveals it is extraordinarily far more than a tiny bubble plumped up with Jell-O. At the same time science has revealed many of nature's secrets that concord nicely with Darwin's theory of common descent. These discoveries seem to keep the theory closely counterbalanced. Believers and unbelievers pull against one another in an endless tug-of-war. A committed Christian might want to echo Isaiah's words, "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down!"

Unnatural

One morning I joined a professor friend for coffee near his university office. He teaches evolutionary biology and professes the Christian faith. Sitting beside sunny windows in a refurbished warehouse we enjoyed a friendly conversation about origins. At one point in the conversation, I looked at a new Ford F-150 parked just outside the window and said, "What is it about that pickup truck that I instinctively

⁹⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/03/science/eugenie-c-scott-fights-the-teaching-of-creationism-in-schools.html>.

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know sets it apart from the gray boulder decorating the city park across the street? Both objects are physical, but the pickup truck..." I paused, struggling to find the right word to express my thoughts, "...but the pickup is, well, unnatural."

For me at least, that was one of those eureka moments. We both studied the pickup to consider the implications. It's lines, curves, doors, paint, chrome, lettering, windows and knobby wheels combined material elements and spatial forms into a handsome object (sorry, I'm favorable to Fords) that had come into existence entirely from natural processes. The components were all completely natural but the Ford truck was unnatural. This is a paradox. Natural processes producing unnatural results? The simple yet puzzling formula goes like this.

Natural Physical Processes + Materials → Unnatural results

What precisely is the *unnatural* and where did it come from? The modern world provides examples of the unnatural at every turn. Even the prehistoric world left us intriguing unnatural creations. Unnatural cave paintings depict hunters spearing a buffalo. Farmers still occasionally plow up an unnaturally serrated flint arrowhead. An F-16 and a notebook computer are unnatural. A library of books and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony are unnatural. Unnatural means that these kinds of things are found only when an intelligent mind has participated in their production.

Interested in the boundaries of science, physicist Eric Hedin engaged honors students on this subject at Ball State University. In 2013 evolutionary biologist Jerry Coyne caught wind that someone at Ball State was entertaining ideas that could undermine pure materialism. A complaint was lodged against Dr. Hedin who then suffered from several months of academic investigation and sensational national media coverage. Ball State finally concluded that Dr. Hedin was not guilty of poor academic practices or violating the "separation of church

and state.”¹⁰⁰ The media loved the story and an otherwise humble, mild-mannered physicist became an internationally known academic rascal. After all the hubbub settled down, Hedin eventually became department chair at another university and penned the compelling book *Canceled Science*. Here is an excerpt from an interview in which he discusses the limits of nature.

Q. Do people who have not studied this issue in depth truly understand the mathematical enormity of the fine-tuning argument? It’s not just “the chances are low” that life arose by chance.

A. Honestly, as a physicist I would be willing to say the physical reality chance of life originating on its own by natural processes within this universe is zero, not just low. It’s because the universe is not infinitely big. There is a finite universe. We don’t have an infinite amount of time, the universe has a finite age, roughly 13.8 billion years. That limited time, limited spatial extent of the universe means that there’s a limited amount that any natural randomness could generate. The probabilistic resources of our universe fall short of what is necessary to develop even one large functional protein molecule that would be just one of tens of thousands of different protein molecules that are needed for human life to exist. It’s almost to me

¹⁰⁰ Historical review shows that the concept “Separation of church and state” has become almost completely reversed from its original purpose. The American founding fathers offered repeated assurances to Christian representatives of diverse traditions that they would be allowed to flourish untroubled by government interference, unlike church groups in many European countries where they often suffered under abuse from the State Church. The wall was intended to keep the government out of church affairs, not keep Christianity out of the public square.

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desperate to keep trying to think that this could have happened by chance.¹⁰¹

If Hedin is correct, we need to rework the above formula. It needs another factor added.

Natural Physical Processes + Materials + Intelligent mind → Unnatural results

The term “missing link” can find a new application here. We are not talking about missing links in the fossil record. In the process above, many people fail to see the link between physics and unnatural products. Engineers, inventors, artists and all sorts of business people know the value of an intelligent mind. The businessman knows that money does not grow on trees. Engineers don’t stare at an immense rock cliff hoping it will eventually turn into a bridge across the river. An earthquake might naturally shake a rough pile of rocks into the river, but no luxury sedan could drive over it. Artists don’t wait for tubes of paint in their studio cabinets to create a new Mona Lisa portrait.

This point is so obviously true it seems ridiculous to have to discuss it. Our modern economies depend entirely on the success of the insertion of *intelligent mind* into the formula of production. Raw materials and random physical activity don’t ensure a successful career. Creative impulses and refined logic keep our shelves and digital showrooms stocked with all sorts of interesting and useful gadgets and services. Recognizing the power of the human mind, people invest billions of dollars in educating, informing, training, and, when necessary, healing the mind so it will be whole and fruitful.

If there is any challenge to the premise that the question of life origins resists certainty, it should be the demonstrably true fact that an

¹⁰¹ <https://evolutionnews.org/2021/08/chances-that-life-originated-without-intelligent-design-zero-says-physicist-eric-hedin/>.

intelligent mind is needed to achieve unnatural results. Without an intelligent mind, the raw ingredients of life face insurmountable physical barriers on their path to becoming an unnatural object.

Specified Complexity

In 1998, Intelligent Design theorist William Dembski wrote *The Design Inference* introducing the concept of specified complexity. He tackles the problem of distinguishing between something random and something designed. Nature contains many kinds of complex patterns like snowflakes or sand dunes. They occur frequently and no one is shocked to find them. They are entirely *natural*. How does a casual observer immediately know that the snowflake on his sleeve formed naturally and the snowman in the front lawn formed unnaturally? Dembski proposes that we know something is designed when we see both complexity and specification. The snowflake is complex but contains no specific information. It doesn't refer to something else. The snowman however refers to a specific thing out of innumerable other things. The snowman refers to a human. Dembski explains it this way, "A single letter of the alphabet is specified without being complex. A long sentence of random letters is complex without being specified. A Shakespearean sonnet is both complex and specified."¹⁰²

The witty Oxford professor John Lennox illustrates this principle with his story of roast chicken. Seated one evening next to a preeminent biochemist at a posh Oxford dinner, Lennox found himself quickly drawn into a challenging conversation about the nature of reality. Learning that Lennox was interested in the Great Questions, the man sighed in disgust and wanted no part of it. Enjoying the challenge, Lennox proposed an experiment. Grabbing the evening's menu, Lennox pointed to the words, "Roast Chicken." Lennox recalls the

¹⁰² Dembski, William A., "Explaining Specified Complexity". Appeared as Metaviews 139 (www.meta-list.org), September 13 1999.

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story,

I said, “You’re a reductionist, everything in terms of physics and chemistry. Now look at this thing here R-O... those are marks aren’t they? But they’re semiotic, Greek sign, they’re marks that carry meaning.”

He said, “That’s right.”

“Okay,” I said, “explain to me the semiotics of those marks in terms of the physics and chemistry of the paper and ink.”

There was a silence.

Then his wife said a bit loudly, “Get out of that if you can!”

He didn’t try.

He said, “John, for 40 years I’ve gone into my laboratory thinking that that could be done...but it can’t.”

I was so amazed that I backtracked and said, “Oh but science has been going on only about 500 years or so.”

He said, “It doesn’t matter. You cannot explain the semiotics bottom-up, you have to introduce an intelligence.”¹⁰³

Snowmen, Ford trucks, and the words *Roast Chicken* printed on an elegant menu cannot be reduced to physics and chemistry. The problem is not only that chance falls far short of being able to put

¹⁰³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6rd4HIEdfw>.

together the words *Roast Chicken*, but only a mind can attach meaning to a symbol completely independent of the symbol's physical properties.

So What's the Problem?

Detecting design is child's play. A three-year-old doesn't work with complicated calculus to determine the probabilities of an ocean wave randomly forming a tidy little sand castle, but she intuitively recognizes its "unnaturalness" and asks, "Who made that Daddy?" The art critic didn't study geology in college, but he knows that Michelangelo didn't discover David's statue formed by an Alpine glacier. Recognizing the power of intelligent design the critic stares at the statue, feeling perhaps even more admiration for the artist than the art.

Suppose the need for intelligent mind in the origins of life is a plausible defeater for any kind of purely materialist account of biology? If life is impossible with an intelligent creator, why would people still bother with materialistic accounts at all? Why don't all scientists become theists? Anyone from the youngest child to the most venerable Nobel Prize winner should be able to say "of course a series of fortunate accidents could never have brought the human body into existence any more than they could produce King David's sculpture. A very intelligent mind created us."

Yet not everyone says that. Uncertainty about life origins rises like swamp mist and many scientists *insist* that life has no intelligent cause.

The advent of digital computing and the internet has added unforeseen depth to our understanding of how intelligent minds can produce unnaturally complex, interlocking systems. Even the non-theist must admit that the digital information age can only be explained by intelligent mind. Why stop there? Why not also recognize the need for intelligence in the creation of information-rich DNA? Human DNA then goes on to produce minds that can tell jokes, build

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computers and print dinner menus at Oxford.

No evidence exists that the physical universe can randomly produce specified complexity. If it is true that the laws of thermodynamics prohibit life from forming naturally then gradually evolving from a single cell into a human being, the only way Darwin's theory could be true is if it involves intelligent design at some level.

This presents a new line of reasoning:

- Had he desired, an all-powerful God could have produced the living world through a method like Darwin's theory.
- Even if early life began as a simple organism which evolved into countless species, physics alone could not make it happen. Life must have had assistance from a super-human mind.
- Therefore Darwinism fails the atheist as evidence against God's existence. Ironically, if Darwinian evolution were true, it could even be given as evidence for theism.

So even if true, Darwinism is hardly justification for atheism. To the contrary, even if it were true, life and all the marvelous creatures could not exist without an intelligent designer. DNA is unnatural. Beaver dams are unnatural. Peacock plumage is unnatural. Unnatural things don't come into existence naturally.

This second Great Question brings us to a hard, inescapable truth. People bring their predispositions to the problem of life origins. These predispositions or presuppositions bend their ability to interpret the data. Once atheism is taken as an *a priori* position, it requires a theory, however contrary it is to the physical evidence, that excludes anything suggestive of the supernatural (or unnatural). Evolutionary theory

requires millions of amazingly lucky coincidences. If someone were as lucky in a casino everyone would accuse him of cheating. No matter. The atheist cannot admit that natural explanations are insufficient to explain the origin of life and all living things.

Modern Disinterest

Humans can use scientific research to discover objective truths about the physical universe at all levels. The universe functions according to physical laws which can often be elegantly expressed by means of mathematic formulas, one of the most famous perhaps is $E=MC^2$. Energy equals mass times the speed of light squared (186,000 miles/sec X 186,000 miles/sec is a very, very big number). I agree that science depends heavily on the unchangeableness and thus predictability of physical laws. If physical laws changed arbitrarily, how could we trust a heart doctor or take a pain reliever? It is this confidence in the stability, observability and predictability of the natural world which allows us to clearly see the fact that purely naturalistic evolutionary theory lacks important material support. Ironically, instead of defeating the need for a super-intelligence, the reliability of science shores up the argument for the necessity of a supernatural agent in the origin of the species. Because the physical laws of science can reliably explain past events and predict future ones, we can gather data in the present which confirm that the complex physical reactions and conditions necessary for the formation, development and diversification of DNA-based life are so improbable as to be practically impossible.

Yet does this really matter in our modern society? What if evidence showed that a super-intelligence is the only plausible explanation for the origin of life and species? How could anyone in the secular mainstream seriously consider such an option given, a) the modern policy of separation of religion and state which sanctions public discussion about spiritual matters in public schools, and b) scientific methodological naturalism which fears that opening the door even a

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tiny bit to non-material explanations (open cosmology) would utterly destroy the entire scientific enterprise?

Muddled Mess

Presuppositions about the nature of reality have indeed caused badly muddled origins discussions. One person insists, “According to Genesis, God created the world in six 24-hour days.” Another replies, “No, the word *day* is not literal. It refers to an epoch.” A third replies, “Forget your holy books altogether, science is the *only* path to truth.” Once a person approaches the question of origins with an established philosophical or theological commitment, he or she will rarely budge, no matter the cost.

Consider Einstein’s greatest blunder. He added an unnecessary mathematical constant to his relativity calculations. Why this uncharacteristic behavior in an otherwise intellectually impartial genius? Because he simply could not stomach the implications of a finite universe. If the universe is not eternal, it raises the eerie feeling that *Something* or *Someone* is out there beyond the hedgerow of time and space. Worse still, instead of keeping his atheistic bias in check, he accused the astronomer/priest Georges Lemaître of inserting his theological commitments into science by proposing the idea of a universe-creating singularity some several billion years ago. Einstein, under tremendous scientific pressure, later removed the constant and allowed the math to speak for itself. The universe had a beginning. We must all accept the brute facts of the universe regardless of theological implications.

Impossible

Enough now of tentatively dancing around the subject of life origins. In light of the most current science, we can confidently assert that blind physical forces *could* not (not *may not*) have ever produced the first life forms. Once life began, random physical processes alone could not produce truly novel structures marking a new genus and perhaps not

even a new species. This strong assertion concords with our simple principle:

Natural Physical Processes + Materials + Intelligent mind → Unnatural results

Like the circuitry in a Wi-Fi router or traffic sign saying “detour ahead”, life is unnatural. Technology and information require a mind and include, at the most primitive level, the realm of personal communication. Perhaps the oddest thing about the unnatural object is that it consists entirely of natural ingredients, but these have been put into an unnatural configuration.

The most current scientific research of life’s marvelous structures and organisms has brought us back to Paley’s watch on the beach. Life is like Paley’s elegant watch nestled in the heath. The appearance of design in biology is open for all to see. But whether from deliberate denial of the plain facts or through passive blindness resulting from disinterest in transcendent matters, many people still prefer to think that the watch came from a blind watchmaker.

Great Question #3

Is Free-will Real?



Chapter 8

Choice

Is free-will real? Can human minds make truly free decisions or is the brain driven along certain lines by a process of physical cause and effect with no choice? Is free-will an illusion created by the brain? In reality do we have any more free-will than our computer? The computer is programmed. Does nature program us to act a certain way? Are artificial intelligence and human intelligence essentially the same?

The question of free-will is tied to the question of the nature of human consciousness. Is the mind the same as the brain or is the mind something spiritual? Christian theists view the mind as working through the body, but ontologically distinct from it. The New Testament uses the word *psyche* for the word mind. Our modern word psychology comes from the Greek vocabulary. When I was a university student one of my friends studied psychology. One evening after a campus event I jokingly suggested to my friend, “You should ask your professor, what is the substance of the *psyche*?” I never heard

if he asked but the question remains a line of vital inquiry. Does the human mind exist with a free-will independent of the brain?

Lots of Fun

Discussions about free-will can generate a lot of fun. Can you choose to keep reading this book? If you eventually finish this book, was it your choice? If there is no free-will, aren't advertisers wasting billions of dollars? Does a bank robber deserve punishment if "the devil—or the chemicals—made him do it?" Did you choose your spouse or did your brain chemicals make you get married? This game could go on all day...can I choose to make it stop!?

Mr. Bob

Mr. Bob was a friendly neighbor with no apparent religious faith. I was only a college student and he was several decades my senior. Some recent training in how to talk about my faith in God boosted my confidence that we could have a good conversation. Everyone in the neighborhood knew Mr. Bob as a thoughtful, sensitive, yet painfully shy individual. Aware of this, I approached him feeling sure of my cause but also anxious. He and his wife graciously welcomed me into their home. After a few minutes of small talk, I tried to touch on deeper questions. Did Mr. Bob believe in God? It was not clear. He sounded more like an atheist in regards to life origins. Nature could produce nature. I then asked, pointing at their sturdy coffee table, "How could a piece of fine furniture like that come into existence randomly?" He responded, "That's different, people made it."

People made it, but so what?

Thirty years later, my son, a mechanical engineer, discussed with me the subject of materialism. He had the same insight I had shared with Mr. Bob on that sunny afternoon. My son said, "Any atheist who says that modern inventions like airplanes and computers are any less a result of blind chance than a rock slide doesn't understand their own

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worldview. If materialism is true, then there is no power to make engineering choices.”

Lucky, Luckier and Luckiest

Molecules and motion, reacting in a seamless chain of cause and effect, bouncing around like billiard balls on a vast pool table, have no power to make choices. Zero. So if they just happen to bounce together in a certain way to construct a finely crafted Amish roll-top desk, the latest smart phone, a paragraph of Shakespearian rhyme, and a few bars of Beethoven, then the world just got lucky and luckier. The fact that these kinds of things happen over and over again to the point that they seem mundane (well, not Shakespeare and Beethoven) means that we happen to live in the luckiest kind of world possible. The word *lucky* doesn't come remotely close to describing human culture and technology. The odds against random, blind forces producing literally billions of machines and pieces of art stretch infinitely beyond the edge of the universe.

Here is a simple illustration. Imagine flipping a coin. The odds of getting ten heads in a row is $1/1024$. This is a relatively small thing, but could still take hours of flipping the coin. Remember, $1/1024$ means the person successfully tosses ten heads in a row out of 1,024 attempts of tossing the coin ten times, on average.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, what are the odds of a person being able to intentionally lay out ten heads in a row? $1/1$. Coin tossing is ridiculously simple compared to assembling an Italian sports car. What odds could be assigned to random activity in the brain assembling the sports car? $1/\text{infinity}$? In contrast, what are the odds that a team of skilled professionals can build a prize-winning machine? $1/100$, $1/50$ or maybe $1/1$? The difference between mind and mindlessness is immeasurable.

¹⁰⁴ 1024 attempts times 10 coin tosses each attempt means the person actually tosses a coin $10,240$ times.

Stubbing our Toe

Someone said that the little toe's purpose is to check the stability of furniture. Nothing hurts quite like stubbing one's toe on the edge of Grandma's old china cabinet. Why do people, sometimes repeatedly, so easily lose sight of the most obvious thing in the room? Is free-will so obviously true that to deny it is to go around stubbing one's toes on every hard object in the room? Is this an overstatement? Is free-will open to debate? Is determinism the obvious reality and believers in free-will suffer from a delusion of possessing the power of choice? Like the previous two Great Questions, the question of free-will has strong opinions on both sides. Why is this? Why is it hard to come to a consensus on the question? Does a person's answer to the question about free-will reflect something deeper?



Chapter 9

The Determinists

Re-Act

Bubbly barrels of wine do not think. They *react*, not act. The fermenting wine has no will power to determine for itself how it will taste, what color it will take, where it will go, who will drink it and how much they must drink to become drunk. Chemists can describe chemical reactions with complex molecular formulas accounting for the exchange of energy, the recombination of molecules, release of excess electrical charges and so on. Everything in the barrel is perfectly explicable according to the reliable laws of physics that make wine production possible.

React is a very simple word that leaves no doubt. For example the wine production involves many steps, each of which was 100% determined by the previous step. One step launched the next step which in turn caused another step. Just like billiard balls in motion, the chemicals take a certain pathway according to the previous action. Add grape juice, yeast, an old oak barrel and out comes sparkling wine.

Every reaction depends upon the previous reaction. They do not come up with new ideas. To be perfectly precise, nothing in the physical world happens *de novo*, entirely absent an antecedent. The only true physical singularity which methodological naturalism recognizes is the Big Bang. Everything since then is a result of cause and effect in the subsequently formed universe. Any materialist who denies the existence of a supernatural, spiritual realm must embrace determinism.

Quantum Uncertainty

The popular superhero movie *Ant-Man* gave audiences a vivid, fantastical glimpse into the bizarre quantum world. Equipped with a high-tech suit, the otherwise unremarkable hero can change sizes from huge to tiny. In one heroic scene he burrows down into the smallest known level of reality, the quantum realm. With the aid of mathematics and particle-accelerating super-colliders, physicists have confirmed that atoms are not the smallest unit of matter. Atoms are made up of electrons, neutrons and protons. These particles can go smaller still, breaking into quarks, boson particles and?

Isaac Newton gave the world its first great theoretical physical system that reliably predicts the behavior of large objects. Einstein pushed further into the physical world with his theory of relativity. He gave the world the surprising understanding that time slows down for an object accelerating to the speed of light. In recent decades quantum physics has matured as physicists have probed deeper into the nature of reality. Newton's world of objects in motion seemed to function like a grand machine where the motion of every cog and wheel could be precisely measured. Einstein's world got a bit weirder with time moving at different rates for objects moving at different speeds. A sci-fi author aroused interest in Einstein's theory with his story of a forty-year-old astronaut who survived for thousands of years. The bewildered man crash landed on a future earth inhabited by a civilization of sophisticated, talking gorillas and chimps. How had he only aged a few years while traveling at the speed of light as the earth

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below aged tens of thousands of years? How could time pass more slowly for objects moving more quickly?

Quantum theory introduced a deeper level of weirdness. Physicists discovered that a single sub-atomic particle could pass through two slits on a paper simultaneously. As the particle passes through the slits, the presence of a human observer will determine where the particle impacts a photographic plate fixed on the other side. Another strange example is quantum pairing. It's as though a paired particle is one particle existing in two physical locations. The paired particle could be hundreds of meters apart or light years apart. Yet, unexplainably, the two move as one particle. What one does, the other does. How do they communicate with each other? If they are one light year apart and still move at precisely the same moment, then they have a means of communication or connection with one another that is faster than the speed of light. But the speed of light is the fastest thing in the known universe! Quantum particles can suddenly pop into existence with no antecedent. In this sense they appear to defy the law of cause and effect. Imagine a second basketball popping into existence in the loser's goal during an exciting game. In ordinary life this would be miraculous. On the quantum level this seems ordinary.

Quantum physics is weird and challenges many common perceptions about life. Could the uncertainty of the quantum realm be a challenge to materialistic determinism? A purely materialistic view of human nature allows no free-will. It says that there is no *self* that exists with power over the chain of physical cause and effect. The physical body *is* the self. Quantum physics does not change this materialistic understanding of human nature. Even if quantum particles can pop in and out of existence, be in two places at one moment and be mysteriously tied to an observer, it does not endow the particles with the power of foresight and choice. A quantum particle that suddenly and unpredictably pops into existence on the quantum level of a synapsis firing within the brain would seem to have negligible effect

on the overall biochemical activity. I can only begin to imagine all the fascinating quantum fluctuations occurring at this moment in my computer as I am typing these words. But I am far more concerned that my sloppy typing will misspell a word than I am worried the computer might turn into an AI rogue behind my back and rewrite this chapter. The computer hardware and software have been programmed to function in a controlled (pre-determined) way based on the laws of physics. Particle physics has contributed to squeezing more and more speed out of computer processors, but quantum uncertainties have not greatly disturbed our daily lives or turned us into human batteries for the Matrix...thankfully.

Matter is the Matter

Carl Sagan was famous for his saying, “The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be.”¹⁰⁵ His words eerily echo a political slogan from the old Soviet Union, “Lenin Lives, Lenin Lived, Lenin will Live.” Both Sagan’s and the Soviets’ slogans call to mind the much older apocalyptic words of the Book of Revelation, “peace from him who is and who was and who is to come...”¹⁰⁶

Something has to exist forever. Nothing comes from nothing. For the materialist, matter *is* the matter. Their cosmology (or mythology) says “In the beginning, Matter.” Big Bang cosmology shook things up in the 20th century (no pun intended). Its implications were inescapable. The universe is finite. But *something* has to exist forever. If not the universe, then what? A multiverse? Something non-material beyond our time and space?

But even if matter was infinite (which it is not), materialism has another thorny problem. Matter has no mind. The unimaginably small

¹⁰⁵ <https://religionnews.com/2014/03/05/carl-sagan-cosmos-will-ever/>.

¹⁰⁶ Revelation 1:4.

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particle that contained our entire universe at the beginning of time possessed no consciousness. Granite boulders, oak barrels filled with hot sauce, grand pianos and super-highways have no consciousness. A dog and a monkey have something going on between their ears, but they haven't started taking selfies as far as we can say. Ants build complex tunnels and beavers are nature's best engineers, but ants haven't started building beaver lodges nor beavers ant hills. Consciousness—human consciousness—is one of a kind. Everyone knows consciousness exists. That is the definition of consciousness: unique self-awareness, especially of the past, present and future. On materialism, consciousness has no explanation. It has no rational cause. It has no source. You have a much better chance of squeezing water from a rock than squeezing consciousness from it. There was less consciousness in the earliest moments of the universe than there was money in the banks in 1929.

Matter is all that matters for the materialist. So if the universe is finite they must make these astounding assertions: Matter came from nothing with no cause. Consciousness arose from non-consciousness, which is to say it came from nothing too. The only way around these two conundrums is to say 1) we just don't yet understand what existed before the Big Bang, but it must have been something "physical" and 2) only physical things exist, so non-material consciousness with free-will does not really exist, it is an illusion.

Illusion, you say? What entity then is having an illusion? Does a bottle of wine have illusions? Do neurons in the brain have illusions? Regardless how far down the materialist delves into matter attempting to undermine the existence of an autonomous, free self, they struggle to avoid terminology of the self.

Is Free-will Uncertain?

In regard to the three Great Questions, scientific determinism might be the hardest to sell. A person's attitude about God can depend a lot

upon their life experiences, how much they may have suffered and their exposure to reasonable discussions about God. Discussions about life origins can become complex and stymie even highly educated people. But who doesn't have a sense of self? Our self-awareness is our place of deepest personal intimacy. It's our personal sanctuary. The simple act of sitting down in a restaurant and taking a moment to browse the menu gives us a satisfactory sense of self-determination. Do I want the Swiss hamburger or the Southwest chili? Will my final choice be determined by the laws of physics? Will some mysterious interaction of quantum forces kick in while my brain chews on the colorful images of food? When I glance across the table at my friend am I under an illusion that *I* am...and *she* is? Are we able to choose our topic of conversation after ordering our food?

Alas, the materialist is left with little to say in answer to such esoteric questions. Matter is all that matters. Against the logic they must doggedly hope that matter is infinite beyond the Big Bang and then with a sigh of remorse they must admit that in fact *they* don't really exist.

Pinocchio

The classic story of the little Italian puppet Pinocchio illustrates the problem of the materialist. The craftsman Geppetto lovingly assembles little wooden boy. A kind-hearted fairy animates the funny little fellow and bestows upon him a unique feature. Each time he tells a lie his wooden nose grows. A long-winded lie produces a long wooden nose.

But we realize that even with the power to walk and talk and tell the truth or a lie, Pinocchio lacks something. He is not a fully human boy. His misadventures sweep him into captivity, ruination and finally despair in the belly of a whale. During the days of Pinocchio's rebellion, his maker Geppetto searches relentlessly for the lost puppet. Reunited in the whale's belly, they attempt a daring escape that

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culminates in the “death” of the wooden puppet. But another spiritual act of grace brings Pinocchio back to life, this time as a real little boy made of flesh and blood. With streaming tears of joy the old man embraces his newborn son.

It’s a powerful image and should move us. But what can the materialist say about it, other than it’s a childish fairy story? On their view of the world, there was never any difference between the wooden Pinocchio and the human Pinocchio, both were simply animated, soulless, material objects. What’s the difference between wood and flesh? What’s the difference between fish and human? What’s the difference between stone and sparrow? Reductionism attempts to bring the nature of a puppet’s wooden body and a little boy’s human body down to the same elemental particles.

Yet a child can see the truth of mind-body dualism embedded in this fairy story. While still a wooden puppet Pinocchio already possessed an immaterial personality. After his rebirth, he became an immortal being delivered from his guilt. A physical body whether wooden or flesh does indeed decay and die. But the essence of the person does not.¹⁰⁷ The story of Pinocchio illustrates the reality of the soul and the preciousness of the human body uniquely crafted to express the personality.

This lesson is lost on the material determinist. On their worldview Pinocchio’s soul was no more real in the first state of wood than the second of human flesh. Furthermore, the possibility of real forgiveness, redemption and regeneration into a new spiritual person is laughable. Lastly, the body is something here today and gone

¹⁰⁷ Taking another step, one could say that Pinocchio was not fully human until his soul, which formerly animated his wooden puppet body, became incarnated in a fully human body. The Christian faith views the mind-body relationship as eternal in the teaching of the final resurrection of the dead unto eternal life.

tomorrow, no more meaningful or enduring than a pile of decaying autumn leaves. The materialist says that to suggest otherwise is as childish as believing in fairies.

In regards to certain folks not unlike sophisticated modern materialists, Jesus once prayed, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children;”¹⁰⁸ The apostle Paul later wrote, “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.”¹⁰⁹

Determinists must live in a rather bleak world. The story of Pinocchio contains no great truths for them. What makes a “real boy”? If being a real person doesn’t include the possibility of consequences for wrong-doing, forgiveness and receiving a fully embodied soul, why not just pull the puppet’s strings? Why not build robots and love them like our own offspring? Why not purchase lifelike sex-bots to satisfy cravings for intimacy? Why not go into a life of pornographic fantasy with realistic CGI images? Without the existence of free-will, a conscience and conscious personhood, the boundary between living and non-living matter disappears.

Are You Certain?

Closing the last page of Pinocchio’s quaint story, pause and ask a child, “What do you think about Pinocchio’s choices?” They give honest answers. He made some bad decisions and he made some good ones. Then ask, “Did he go through a change?” “Of course,” they reply with certainty. “He became a completely real boy.”

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 11:25.

¹⁰⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:26.



Chapter 10

“We Used Our Brains”

In recent times a small cottage industry of deconstructed theists has sprung up on social media. Former theists (usually former Christians) tell their stories in books, videos and podcasts, often appealing to emotion and unsophisticated pop culture thinking. One of these sat down with a Christian theist before a live audience and their discussion was later posted online. During the question and answer period someone asked the un-theist what he would say to God if he were to die and suddenly awake to discover he had been wrong. Chuckling as he answered, the man said he thought perhaps God will have a special room for atheists and will congratulate them for their intellectual honesty in evaluating the evidence. “After all,” he said, “we used our brains.”

His retort, “we used our brains,” came on the heels of a discussion just a little earlier in the evening about how our consciousness is an illusion and free-will does not exist. According to the un-theist, and all other materialists, mind is not really separate from the gray matter inside the

human skull. They believe that the power to think is matter in motion. But matter doesn't make choices. It can only follow physical laws as they operate along a chain of causes and effects.

The un-theist, in a style not unlike a smooth-talking used car salesman, smuggled in contradictions and exaggerated offers. Perhaps others caught the problem which should be obvious by now. The un-theist objectified the brain as a tool, like a hand or a pocket knife which is controlled by a will. Furthermore, he asserted that his personal will is praiseworthy because it made a good choice in how it used the brain. An old TV ad used to say "a brain is a terrible thing to waste." But the clever un-theist thinks he should be rewarded—by the Almighty no less—for not wasting his.

In Search of the "I"

I lightly move my fingers on the keyboard to type this sentence. Right now I am looking at two letters: A and B. Simple. Just two choices. I can pick one or the other. My fingers are an extension of my hand. My hand connects to my arm which connects to my shoulders, connected to my spinal cord that runs from my head to my hips. The spinal cord is a fantastically complex bundle of nerves that drops down from the cerebral cortex and the brain. A lifetime of medical study would just scratch the surface of the human nervous system. This whole apparatus, from the brain to the tips of my fingers, provides me with arguably the most sophisticated medium in the universe for interacting with the physical world. The most agile robotic arm pales in comparison to Michael Jordan elegantly dropping a basketball over the rim.

Looking at A and B on the keyboard, I use foreknowledge in thinking to myself, "To illustrate the power of mind over matter and free-will, I will promise the reader that I will pick the letter B." Does physical matter have the power to plan for the future? Does it have the power to pick one choice and not another to achieve a distant goal? Atheistic

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materialism answers of course not! But here goes. A or B? Which one did I promise to pick? Should I close my eyes? Should I flip a coin? If I promise you the reader that I will choose B, can I keep my word? Does physical matter make and keep promises? To make this more interesting, I promise you that I will use the letters A and B to make a predetermined pattern. I will type them three times in alphabetical order and then three times in reverse. ABABAB. BABABA. Whew! What a relief! I did it! I made promise (or prediction) and I fulfilled it. It's a miracle.

Joking aside, something serious happened here. Something serious happens with every decision, every behavior, every word. The seriousness lies in the "this/not this" course of events that reveals the potential for volition. Even the un-theist wants there to be a *self* that controls the brain and he wants praised for it.

When searching for the elusive *I*, materialists have an impressive array of technology at their disposal. The brain emits a marvelous package of electromagnetic energy waves that can be monitored with sophisticated imaging. Yet in all the scans, no doctor has yet to spot a little ghost flitting around inside the cranium. When deprived of oxygen just seconds to minutes after the heart stops beating, the brain itself dies. In the old days people watched cathode-ray televisions. Moments after shutting off the television its screen would pop and flash, then random flecks of black and white slowly faded away. No more reruns of old sit-coms flashing across the lively screen. It's dead.

The materialist expects the same from the human *self* after the brain is deprived of oxygen. The brain dies. The *self* dies. The *I* fades away, popping and flashing a moment then passing into nothing. Maybe that's what happens to a dog when it dies. A materialist considers humans as just slightly more advanced mammals, cousins of the dog and cat.

What changes in the person from one hour before he dies and one

hour later? Physiologically speaking the body is the same. It has the same organs, blood vessels and brain. Metabolically speaking the process of respiration has ceased, so that oxygen is no longer inhaled and distributed via the red blood cells to the body's one trillion cells. Neurologically speaking, the electrical impulses in the nervous system have ceased. The man was alive and now he is dead. He isn't there anymore.

At the ultimate point where a human being dies, the ability of science to explain the disappearance of the "self" dies too.¹¹⁰ Something grievous and profound has changed. As mourning loved ones gather around the lifeless body of beloved mother or father they receive little comfort that the body is still there. Decent people lovingly prepare the corpse for burial, but they take no joy in its lifelessness, never mind how much it may resemble the living person who was there just 24 hours earlier. The fact that gray cells of the brain are still there brings no comfort. They want *the person* himself or herself. The materialist says that *the person* they long for was never anything more than a particular arrangement of physical matter and energy. How could it be otherwise? In Sagan's infamous words, "the Cosmos is all....."

Strangely, few people allow language to express this view of reality in its full force. If materialists speak of the dead as "the departed" or "the passed" they fall into the same trap of the un-theist who feels

¹¹⁰ Surprisingly, science struggles with defining other fundamental realities of existence such as gravity and life. We can describe what these things do, but what are they? What is the missing ingredient between a living amoeba and a dead one? The chemicals are the same, but life is missing. Is life an energy form on the electromagnetic spectrum? Can we someday learn to capture a photograph of life under a lifeometer, bottle it and put it back into the dead amoeba so it resuscitates? Might some Dr. Frankenstein uncover the dark secret of creating a human from cobbling together dead limbs and organs? Scripture states quite simply of the Messiah, "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col 1:17). This suggests that apart from the metaphysical the physical could not exist.

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proud that “we used our brains.” If the self consists only of the physical body, then the dead loved one has not departed or passed anywhere. They have ceased to exist. They are not just dead, in the sense that a computer screen is dead but could be restarted, but are nothing, as if they never existed. For atheist materialists, frank language lifts the veil from their attempts to paint a cheery smile on a dismal reality.

Another Dimension

Throughout this book we have continually come back to an all-important point. Matter has no mind. Physical laws do not have foresight. Molecules do not hold executive meetings and plan new marketing campaigns or engineer new designs. How would science detect the existence of a mind? If a rock had a mind, how would anyone know? Do dogs have minds? When my ninny dog gets off her leash we sometimes remark that she “loses her mind.” Did she ever have one? Does a computer have a mind? Perhaps we can confidently suggest: It takes a mind to know one. It’s a direct knowing, unaided by instrumentation. If we depended on instrumentation, we would then only be able to detect matter and energy. If the materialist is correct that mind is an illusion of the brain, then we could *only* detect brain activity, which consists of the same fundamental matter and energy as everything else around us. A sensitive instrument can detect electric waves in my skull and detect electric waves in the cell phone. The presence of electrical activity therefore is not useful in distinguishing a human mind from a cell phone. I can do chemical tests on brain matter and on foam insulation. Both substances could contain some carbon atoms. Chemical tests therefore cannot confirm or dispute the presence of a mind. Even if the mind is material, science is still nevertheless unable to measure it and differentiate it from all other energy and matter. In other words, no scientist has yet discovered the existence of a unique form of energy known as *mind*. Such a mysterious physical energy exists only in

science fiction.

What does a radio, a Wi-Fi speaker and a teenager have in common (other than playing obnoxious music at odd hours of the night?) What do I and my notebook computer have in common? Not the reliability of our memory! All of the above are buzzing with electrical activity. Some of the electrical activity is channeled inorganically and other organically. The result is a great deal of light and heat and motion. But here I am, a self-aware person (not so sure about the teen.) The materialist takes all of these into the laboratory and does a series of experiments. *Viola!* His data shows that the devices and the humans are all completely material by nature. There is nothing else present but molecules and electrical forces. When pressed about the nature of the mind, he is forced into a very uncomfortable dilemma. He must choose between two positions. He can say, "I couldn't physically detect anything that could be identified as a *mind*, therefore I can only conclude that there is no so thing as a mind." Or he can answers, "I cannot scientifically detect anything called a mind, but I intuitively know there is a mind—my mind tells me there is a mind and the human being does things that unintelligent physical laws cannot explain—so I conclude that the mind is something not of this world." The guild of materialism has some ground rules. Playing by these rules, our scientist friend can never say the second thing in public. After hanging up his lab coat and eating supper with his wife and kids he may freely express his opinion.

"How was work today, honey?" his wife inquires.

"I measured the voltage of a cell phone and a human brain today."

He gets his son's attention. "What'd you find, Dad? Anyone home?"

"Yes, I suppose if you mean, did he have a living brain."

His wife casts a stern glance at him.

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He clears his throat. “I mean, of course, he’s a real person, not a guinea pig.”

Diplomatically handled.

Mathematical formulas do not think. Chemicals do not think. Nuclear forces do not think. In thousands of years of human thinking, we have yet to find thinking going on in the non-human physical substrate of this home we call the universe. We have yet to find a conscious mind outside of our minds.

The un-theist mentioned earlier illustrates this point too. When asked about the existence of objective morality, he quipped that morals evolved. He said humans and higher animals don’t kill and eat their babies because we have evolved to a place where we consider that wrong. The other speaker quickly replied, “Lions sometimes kill their young.”

Uncomfortable laughter.

Scrambling to recover, the first man said that we should ask lions why they do that. Again, the second man quickly replied, “Good luck with that.”

Indeed. Though lions have brains, sophisticated social behavior, astounding and at times terrifying physicality, they don’t talk. Humans can have important and meaningful relationships with just about anything. Some years ago a clever entrepreneur made his riches from selling pet rocks. From rocks to the king of beasts, humans have many opportunities to form bonds of affection but whenever we find ourselves condescending to something non-human, we discover as i Genesis says, it is “not a suitable partner.”

The flippant remarks of the un-theist almost give the impression of a lack of seriousness about the gravity of the existential questions. On social media another popular un-theist flaunted his cavalier attitude

saying how liberated he feels to quit taking life so seriously. It's all a big joke, a silly drama, a tragi-comedy on the cosmic theater with no ultimate playwright. So what if theism or atheism is true? So what if the self is a real, immaterial thing? Take life as it comes and don't bother sweating or fretting over it. After the stage lights are turned off and everyone goes down to the pub for a drink one can forget about the reality of the soul. Eat, drink and be merry. Whether or not you hold a correct world view doesn't change the warm feeling of a full belly.

Cavalierly dismissing the Great Questions might provide temporal relief from existential angst. But the questions have a stubborn way of coming to knock on the door in the wee hours of the morning. Like the Spirit of Christmas yet to come, the specter of darkness raises its head a hundred different ways to remind us that left to itself, the physical universe tends downward to the grave. Entropy increases. Heat dissipates. Bodies die. Watching ourselves and our loved ones grow old keeps bringing us back to the question of an immaterial self. This immaterial "I" can watch its body deteriorate while not aging itself. Even more, the "I" entertains ideas of perpetuity, of permanence. The *self* can imagine *itself* living forever.

Forever Self

Forever could have two meanings. In one sense forever could mean time with no end, like a line that stretches into infinity. This kind of forever is a sequence of events with a past, present and future. Modern physics suggests that the universe is not infinite in size or lifespan. It is expanding, but how long can that go on? At some point the universe will run out of energy and itself die. Will time stop to exist? Current theories say the universe will continue to expand forever but eventually become cold and lifeless due to entropy.

The second kind of forever is an ever-present now. In the ever-present now there is no past, present and future, only the present

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moment. One could call this eternity. The traditional Christian belief is that God eternally exists outside of time and space. In one glance he sees all of the history of time from the first moments of creation to the distant future. His abode is not a place of time. There are no clocks in heaven.

The self can envision a state of existence which is the perpetual *now*. The laws of physics as now constructed would not allow eternal existence as a physical being. After considering the multitude of physical constraints of the universe, we could speculate that a very different kind of universe could be created, one in which time, matter and space could go on in a linear direction for infinity. But if the mind is immaterial by nature, it makes no difference in regard to its potential for eternity. If another dimension exists outside the current physical realm, the mind could be free to continue according to its essence.¹¹¹

Just because the mind can envision eternal life does not make it true anymore than imagining a unicorn causes one to come galloping down the street. But it does open the door to more intriguing questions. Any honest thinker will realize that eternity is an inescapable fact. If we deny some kind of eternity exists we might as well deny all existence. *Something* exists. What will happen to it all? Whether one has a linear or circular view of time, either way proceeds into infinity. Mathematics easily works with an infinity of numbers counting upwards (or backwards into the negatives). A straight line might go on and on or a circle may go round and round and round. Just as the philosophers ask why there is something rather than nothing, we can easily ask, isn't the state of being or non-being in some sense eternal? To be or not to be. Either way, forever is a fact.

¹¹¹ The Christian view of eternity is that God will create a new cosmos. Will linear time exist in the new creation or will it be perpetually now with no past and no future? If there are no clocks in heaven will there be clocks in the new age?

Can't Quite Reach

Ever tried changing a light-bulb on a vaulted ceiling? Get out the tallest ladder and climb way up beyond the yellow and red warnings on the higher steps. Stretch as far as you can but still...you can't...quite...reach the bulb to loosen it. You stretch your fingers out just a little more, praying that the wobbling ladder doesn't suddenly slip out from under your feet (and praying your spouse doesn't suddenly walk in to witness your folly).

For at least 150 years Western civilization has secularized the thinking of the average person, making them like the light-bulb changer on the ladder. We ponder the materialist's inherent contradiction when he or she says, "we should be applauded because we used our brains to think for ourselves." We watch the limits of the scientist's ability to identify and measure the mind. We acknowledge that rocks don't dream. We use our minds to recognize mind. We stretch and stretch upwards to the light bulb of accepting the existence of an immaterial mind, but we come dangerously close to tumbling to our injury or death. Materialism grips modern people too tightly. Do we think and reflect? That's just our biochemistry it says. Do we paint or compose music? Those are brain waves. However sublime, beautiful and mysterious, it is entirely physical. Sagan taught us. Isn't the "cosmos all there ever was, is or will be?" Firmly grasping belief in an immaterial mind remains elusive.

What if we need a taller ladder? But what ladder would be tall enough to securely reach the knowledge of an immaterial mind possessing consciousness, free-will and the potentiality for eternal existence? This brings us back to one of the main questions of this book, if an immaterial realm exists, why do so many people complain that the evidence is so sketchy? If God created humans in his image, created with an immaterial, immortal mind, why bury the fact under an avalanche of modern science and philosophical materialism? At the moment of death why doesn't God make it much clearer that an

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immaterial soul departs the body? Why not give us a taller ladder to reach the light?

In our search for a taller ladder we could turn to testimonies of people who were declared clinically dead and then resuscitated. Researchers have compiled thousands of near-death stories. Some folks were dead for a few minutes and some for many minutes or an hour or more. These testimonies make for fascinating reading and have inspired more than a few books and movies. They provide qualitative psychological data for the activity of the human mind, but they don't convince the materialist of an immaterial soul. The materialist always comes back to the same conclusion, the physical brain did it, end of story.

Perhaps the light bulb of the immaterial soul is permanently out of reach of science and argumentation, in the same way the existence of an immaterial, eternal, all-mighty, personal God is beyond the limits of science. A moment of simple reflection explains why. Science concerns itself with the physical realm. It can only measure what is finite. The Christian scriptures define God entirely differently. "God is spirit."¹¹² This is a classic case of mixing apples with oranges. The universe is physical. God is spiritual. Physical tools can effectively interact with the physical universe to quantify, dissect, accelerate and smash it. What good are these tools for detecting something spiritual? A Geiger counter wouldn't be used to find out if a girl likes a guy, how much less could it detect the presence of a spiritual mind?

As with the first and second Great Questions, this third Great Question leaves us looking up at a light bulb on a vaulted ceiling that we can't quite touch, but whose light bathes us on every turn. We see countless effects in the physical world that call for a *self* or *selves*. We truly do use our brains. We can plot a course in life that takes us down a well-lit roadway of pleasant scenes or a dark, dank alley that leads

¹¹² John 4:24.

into frightening shadows. The self asserts itself, sometimes raging against the world around it, as though in an act of rebellion to scream out to the cosmos, "I am not you! I am autonomous!" Even when hitting up the casinos, people eagerly try to exert their will over the heartless dice for a win, "six, six gimme a SIX!" The essence of the free human mind cannot be downloaded into a super-computer nor distilled in a vat. Its light is cast down through the eons from the hauntingly beautiful cave hand-paintings to the lingering echoes of chamber music in a cathedral. Matter has no mind. Mind comes from above.



Chapter 11

What is Mind?

We could arrange a computer with an attached video camera facing its screen so that we could watch an infinite number of images of the screen fading into the background. Facing two mirrors towards one another gets the same effect, an infinite number of images reflecting into the background. A fantasy novel could have fun describing multiple parallel universes with all those precise mirror images that stretch on forever.

The human mind can do an experiment as well, in which we can contemplate ourselves contemplating ourselves. A brilliant mind, the kind that can foresee dozens of chess moves could probably contemplate itself many times over again, like gazing into an endless series of mirror images.

A human mind programmed the computer, invented the camera and set up the video recording. The computer does not have personality, though it records a video of itself. The missing part, the mind, exists in its human master.

Asking about the nature of the mind brings us to the very edge of a dangerously deep chasm of the unknown. The previous chapters have argued that a conscious and freely choosing mind cannot be reduced to physics. The particular features of the human mind include the power of the will, self-awareness, autonomy and to some degree the power to transcend the physical world. If the mind is not material, what is it?

Problems With This Inquiry

In our secular, scientific society, all questions must have natural answers. One of the attractive features of this world-view is the reassurance it gives humanity that nature is something we will someday completely master. The narrative says that people will progressively analyze and understand the physical world down to the smallest particles, eliminating disease, alleviating suffering, prolonging life and advancing technology for surviving and thriving. This is not an idle hope. Steven Pinker illustrates this hope and how he sees it being fulfilled in his book *Enlightenment Now*. Transhumanists take another step and suggest that technology can be merged with the human body to offer secular immortality. By suggesting that something immaterial truly exists, especially something as critical to the human essence as the mind, is catastrophic to the secular eschatology. The entire progressive, secular, utopian enterprise hinges on the assumption that the physical universe is all that exists. For humans to be successful in manipulating, bending, shaping, controlling and redesigning nature according to what we deem most desirable, we must be able to have complete access to nature at every level. For the transhumanists, the human mind *must* have a key to unlock all of nature and enter it, including entering itself. Nothing can be allowed to hinder access and no cost is too high. No doubt many benevolent scientists consider this necessary to achieve their humanitarian goals of alleviating suffering, but less savory elements may want untethered access to the mind for different reasons. C.S. Lewis illustrates this ruthless and greedy bent

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toward omnipotent science in his prophetic and marvelous story *This Hideous Strength*.

The standard answer that the brain is the mind keeps people hoping for more and more access to the mind as science understands the brain better and better. To suggest that an immaterial mind works through a material brain is to commit scientific heresy. The guilty parties must be burned at the stake—figuratively of course. With the stakes so high a great many people will shut down the conversation right here. Someone will quickly make the accusation that suggesting the existence of an immaterial mind is a science-stopper. This is always the accusation made when suggesting a realm exists beyond the reach of science. What if former scientists had explained lightening as the hand of God and stopped looking for a natural explanation? Wouldn't we still be burning candles at night? They reason that if you suggest the existence of an immaterial mind you will, for example, shut down research which could someday cure mental diseases. Therefore, they say, religion is the world's greatest hindrance to scientific progress. Indeed, theism might be a bad thing...if they were right that the mind is only the brain.¹¹³

However, the same accusation of science-stopping could easily be turned against the modern multiverse proponents. If an ensemble of other universes exists which birthed out our universe, it is completely beyond the reach of science and can only be speculated. But if they exist, then one could also imagine that at any moment in our universe, a cure for cancer could suddenly pop into existence from one of these other universes. We already have actual evidence that our universe popped into existence inexplicably. If amazing things just pop into

¹¹³ God's existence is a separate issue from the immortality of the soul. God could have made humans to think and have free-will but still cease existing at their death. The immortality of the soul is a feature of grace that shows God's desire for a permanent, loving relationship with men and women.

existence (and the current laws of physics could suddenly drop out of existence) then why bother with research? So the multiverse theory could be a science-stopper too.

Belief in intelligent aliens is also a science stopper. Why bother trying to achieve scientific breakthroughs if the universe is probably teeming with intelligent life which could at any moment land on our planet and—if they don't eat us first—share all manner of fantastic technology with us? Perhaps our planet was seeded by super-intelligent space aliens. Therefore, since they have our original DNA blueprints, we need to focus more effort on finding our alien parents and asking them to help us fix the broken parts. So belief in space aliens is also a science-stopper.

The historical fact is that theistic belief, especially in northern European Christian Reformed cultures, fueled modern science. Theism is not a science-stopper but a science-sparker. This point has been made in recent books like *The Return of the God Hypothesis* and *Atheism is Dead*. Early scientific theists perceived the cosmos as a law-governed creation, designed for discovery by an intelligent mind. They believed that an omnipotent and freely creative God could make the universe however he wanted, unconstrained by philosophical ideals. So instead of sitting around like the ancient Greeks contemplating how the universe *should* work, they advocated the scientific method of actual observing and testing. Furthermore they didn't consider the created order a mystical taboo inhabited by capricious deities, but good and welcoming according to God's good intent. This Christian theistic worldview put steroids into scientific advancement. Yet these early Christian theists humbly recognized limits in science. They recognized the existence of an immaterial realm of thought and mind that scientific inquiry could never directly access. As with entrance to the Garden of Eden, direct tampering with the immaterial mind is declared forbidden by the flaming sword of the Angel of Ontology. Ontological barriers to the soul stop investigators cold in their tracks

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and no amount of hubristic humanistic protestations can force the door open.

Spirit and Body

The Hebrew Scriptures introduced a multi-dimensional worldview. The very first verse of the Bible lays out the contrast. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”¹¹⁴ Two realities are immediately juxtaposed: timeless God and time-bound physical cosmos. This verse doesn’t indicate the size or age of stars, galaxies or the earth, but that isn’t the most important point, because their size and age are changing constantly. The importance of this verse is that it declares how two very different realities exist and one of them eternally “preceded” (transcends) and brought the other into existence. The next verses of Genesis 1 show that the biosphere was created out of the physical substrate of the cosmos. God even created the first humans from the “dust of the ground”.¹¹⁵ But then he did something extraordinary. He made humanity “in His image”¹¹⁶ (*imago Dei*) and breathed into them the breath of life. Judaism and Christianity reject any hint that God has a super-human physical body like ours. God is spirit. The *imago Dei* must refer to something immaterial. It refers to the reality first encountered in the beginning before even the first flicker of the cosmos came into existence. It is the spiritual realm.

The Hebrew word for spirit is *Ruach*. The same word can be used for breath. Life, down to the smallest bacterium, has a mysterious spark of life which scientists have still have not ignited in the laboratory. Frankenstein’s weird monster is still a wild fantasy. But this yet-to-be explained spark of life does not equate with the kind of “breath” given

¹¹⁴ Genesis 1:1.

¹¹⁵ Genesis 2:7.

¹¹⁶ Genesis 1:27.

to the first humans. “Breath” is a metaphor for the immaterial spirit of man, which could also be called a conscious mind. The bible tells that God holds counsel within his personal thoughts. Humans—and as far as we know only humans—can also reason and have conversations in their hearts. The immaterial mind of humans is clearly related to the immaterial mind of the Being who was present at the beginning of the cosmos and its cause. If we had no other reason to think that the human mind is immaterial, this creation account would suffice. The human mind is made in the likeness of an eternal person who willed the cosmos into existence (and presumably could will it out of existence) and is therefore independent of the physical world. God doesn’t need a brain. He possesses a purely spiritual nature but has chosen to interact with the physical cosmos in a variety of ways and means for certain purposes. Could this be an accurate way of also describing how the human mind reflects the divine nature? The human mind is purely spiritual in nature but interacts with the physical world, using the brain and body as its medium. Nobel Prize winner Neurologist Dr. John Eccles took this unpopular position. “He was a dualist — he thought there was both a mental realm and a physical realm. It's not a popular theory.”¹¹⁷ For him the mind used the brain as a tool. We could add, the mind also uses hands and a mouth as tools to feed its brain breakfast each morning for a new day of thinking.

The human mind is embodied but doesn’t consist of the physical body alone. The Christian view of immaterial mind and material body is that the two are so intricately intertwined that they will be forever knit together. If this is so, what then happens to a person when their body expires and passes into complete decomposition over the millennia? This question leads directly to an empty tomb carved into a stone hillside just outside Jerusalem.

¹¹⁷ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-13/sir-john-eccles-the-scientist-who-went-in-search-for-the-soul/10089676>.

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The New Testament records in no small detail the final days in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. In the 19th and 20th centuries, “higher critics” of the Bible attempted to sift through the scriptures to sort out historical fact from what they believed was myth. Their criteria of what counted as fact or myth was based on anti-supernatural presuppositions. Rather than encountering a miracle in the Gospel accounts, for example the feeding of the five thousand, and judging its historicity according to the same standards as judging the accuracy of the story of Lincoln’s assassination by John Wilkes Booth, the higher critics immediately demythologized (dismissed) the miracle accounts regardless of possible historical support, since after all, “everyone knows miracles never happen!” But they used faulty reasoning. The fact is that no one could know for certain that divine miracles never happen—unless he or she is an *a priori* materialist. David Hume popularized the line of thinking that no matter how improbable a natural explanation might be for an alleged miracle, it is always more probable than a supernatural explanation (which in his estimation was zero). But then we enter circular thinking: no evidence for miracles could ever be sufficient so we know miracles don’t happen...miracles don’t happen so there could never be sufficient evidence for them. One might as well say that we know miracles never happen because we know miracles never happen. This is hardly persuasive, and a straightforward reading of the New Testament reveals that the writers (some holding the equivalent of a PhD in their education) placed high value on building an intellectually rigorous case for the reliability of their historical evidence for miracles. For example, Luke set out the principles of his historical research in the opening statement of his biographical record.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered

them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.¹¹⁸

The Apostle John emphasized the value of first-hand testimony,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.¹¹⁹

The Apostle Peter wrote, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”¹²⁰

These ancient writers followed core principles of establishing reliability:

1. Interviewing first-hand witnesses
2. Including corroborating details

¹¹⁸ Luke 1:1-4.

¹¹⁹ 1 John 1:1-4.

¹²⁰ 2 Peter 1:16.

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3. Using testimony from witnesses who had no reason to lie and could potentially suffer for telling the truth.
4. Reporting on the event from both friends and enemies.

The Gospel writers were tasked with a special purpose. They did not attempt to write in-depth biographies of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. If they mention his childhood at all, they breeze through rather quickly. More space is given to his three-year period of public ministry, but even that passes quickly in their accounts. The force of these biographical accounts reaches a climax in the final hours of his life. The storm clouds of political and religious hostility towards Jesus gathered during the Jewish Passover holiday. Feeling existentially threatened by Jesus, the Jewish religious leaders held counsel and demanded the Roman authorities to execute Jesus on a cross. Unwilling to risk a riot or outright revolt, Pilate succumbs to their requests. First he orders his soldiers to scourge Jesus and then he decrees that they haul him and his cross to the hill Golgotha where they brutally and shamelessly murder a perfectly innocent man. All four Gospel accounts come to this act of finality with great detail. One has to use little imagination to see the ripped flesh on Jesus' back, plugs of hair ripped from his beard and a crudely fashioned crown of thorns stabbed into his skull. Anyone with a sensitive heart cannot help but recognize this as one of the greatest travesties in history and no amount of secular demythologizing can blunt the shock and horror of it.

The crucifixion of Jesus was a physical event in the material universe. Even non-believers recognize the historicity of Jesus' crucifixion. In the first century thousands of people died on horrible Roman crosses. Even if Jesus was crucified, others have suffered at least as much pain and shame, if not worse. Why harp on this one Jesus of Nazareth event as though it holds meaning for the entire human race? People live and die, some horribly. What makes the death of a 1st century Jewish rabble-rouser so special? To see why this crucifixion is the

greatest event in all history we have to keep reading. The Gospel accounts do not abandon us staring hopelessly at Jesus' lifeless corpse alongside the disillusioned disciples. More on that in a moment.

Jesus himself died on a cross. No one else was secretly substituted to die in his place. Jesus wasn't almost dead on the cross and resuscitated. Countless witnesses saw him die. Romans didn't mess around with execution. When they brutally tortured and killed somebody, he stayed dead. If there was any doubt about the criminal hanging onto life, they took a huge mallet and shattered the leg bones so the gasping man would quickly lose ability to raise himself up to inhale and therefore suffocate. They examined Jesus for any vital signs by piercing his side with a long spear. Blood and water gushed out, a medical indication of death. Weeping, heart-broken family and friends stood around the countryside below the cross. The shock and horror of watching Jesus die must have naturally shaken their bodies with waves of grief. The scourging with a lead-tipped whip, the repeating beatings, the crown of thorns, the cross, the nails, the ripping and tearing and spitting and cutting would have rendered Jesus' body a mutilated mass of bloody flesh. We would probably rather not think about it. But this was the body his loved ones had to force themselves to prepare for burial—and quickly, since the Jewish Sabbath would start soon and their ceremonial laws forbid them from taking care of his burial then. The scriptures report that a sympathetic Sanhedrin leader named Joseph of Arimathea donated his own prepared tomb cut from solid rock which would be sealed with a large round stone rolled across the entrance.

Resurrection

The Old Testament gives a couple of fascinating pictures of death moving in reverse. The prophet Ezekiel tells this riveting story.

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he

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led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.” So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.¹²¹

Bone to bone, sinew to flesh, skin to body, the whole process of decay reversed itself. The crowning moment comes when the breath—there it is again, the *Rûach*—flows into these reconstituted bodies so that they live again.

In his pithy writings, the prophet Daniel describes a final resurrection

¹²¹ Ezekiel 37:1-10.

of the dead at the end of time. These kinds of writings are called apocalyptic, due to their teachings disclosed about the end of all things. Daniel writes,

I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, “O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?” He said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days. But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.”¹²²

“Rest” and “stand” in the last sentence indicate the resurrection of the dead. The critical point here is that in the apocalyptic scheme pure mind will not be left to remain in an indefinite state of disembodied existence. Bones, sinew, muscle and skin—the earthiest parts of human earthiness—will get a total makeover. Daniel envisioned his dead body marvelously returning to life after countless millennia, regardless of how much it had decayed.

The final resurrection expectations of Ezekiel, Daniel and many 1st century Jewish believers does not count for proof that resurrection from the dead can occur. It does indicate a very curious desire seated deeply in the human psyche. Do cats long for resurrection from the dead? Elephants? Killer whales? This longing for resurrection from the dead (which is categorically different from hope of an eternal

¹²² Daniel 12:8-13.

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disembodied existence) is a uniquely human experience.

But is resurrection from the dead truly possible? Jesus the Nazarene gave a resounding “YES”! Sealed and heavily guarded within a rock tomb, the badly mangled corpse of the self-proclaimed Jewish Messiah was left to decay into oblivion. No amount of spices or wrappings could preserve his corpse forever. Like the mummified Pharaohs of grand ole’ Egypt, this dead Judean peasant should have succumbed to the natural processes of physics. His body should have dried out and shriveled up. In time nothing could stop microorganisms from consuming his flesh. The passing of time, even in the nearly perfectly dry climate around Jerusalem, should have caused the chemicals in his decomposing body to break down so that one day the only thing left would be dry bones of calcium. After more time passed these calcified bones should have slowly turned into dust. “Ashes to ashes...dust to dust.”

That should have happened.

But it didn’t.

Not according to some of the most detailed ancient manuscripts in our possession. Gospel accounts, early church accounts (*The Acts of the Apostles* authored by Luke) and carefully researched formal church letters authored by several of the early church leaders all attest to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. On Mars Hill, the intellectual and cultural heart of the ancient world, the Apostle Paul summarizes the issue clearly and concisely.

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by *raising him from*

the dead.” (Italics added).¹²³

Some years earlier, in his Pentecost Address, the Apostle Peter declared the same thing to his mostly Jewish audience.

God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.”¹²⁴

In the 1st century Mediterranean basin, no ethnic group was allowed to remain in the dark on the news of resurrection. Jewish leaders and people got the message loud and clear as it was proclaimed even in their most holy place—the Jerusalem temple. The Greeks got the whole story right at the top of their cherished Mars Hill. On a sacred hill dedicated to their human-like god of war, Paul declared the news of an Almighty God who desired to make peace with a rebellious creation and give the gift of resurrection from the dead. Later Paul would make the resurrection of the Messiah known throughout many Roman provinces and Rome itself. Thus Jews, Greeks and Romans came to know without a doubt that hundreds—yea thousands—of people were willing to put it all on the line in testifying that resurrection from the dead is possible and had really taken place no matter how extraordinary or impossible it sounded.

Countless books have analyzed the resurrection of Jesus from historical, scientific, philosophical and theological perspectives. Only

¹²³ Acts 17: 30-31.

¹²⁴ Act 2:24-27.

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two responses are possible when confronted with the news that Jesus rose from the dead. He did or he did not. The New Testament record proves that it did not take long before both of these responses publically burst forth. The Mars' Hill story illustrates this well. Paul boldly told the Greek elites that a Jewish peasant named Jesus physically rose from the dead.

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.¹²⁵

Interestingly, the mocking did not start earlier when Paul quoted to the Greeks from one of their own poets who wrote, "For we are also his offspring" referring to the creator God. As good polytheists or just simply good intellectuals, willing to consider something new and exciting, they could tolerate this mildly theistic proposal. But when the conversation turned to an empirical, historical event—the resurrection of a dead man—this was over the top. So they mocked him. No one had *ever* seen a man dead for three days raise himself back to life. No one had ever heard of a man brutally crucified on a Roman cross come back from the other world to tell about it. What form did their mocking take? We are not privy to those details. The original word for mocking (χλευάζω *chleuazō*) suggest jeering with an upturned expression of the lips. They wanted to treat him like a madman or an idiot with demeaning words and body language. "Paul, you fool, you madman, you worthless babbler, you mentally ill freak, you dishonorable hick from the Tarsus backwaters!" Whatever they had in their arsenal to try and make the Apostle Paul feel deeply humiliated,

¹²⁵ Act 17:32-34.

we can be sure they fired it. It calls to mind the comments of a more modern sophisticate who exhorted his followers to treat theists contemptibly.

Mock them! Ridicule them! In public! Don't fall for the convention that we're all too polite to talk about religion.¹²⁶

If Paul had entertained any fleeting illusions of getting a faculty post at the University of Areopagus, they were quickly dispelled by the cruel laughs, sneers and dismissive insults. In another era he would have likely met similar treatment at Cambridge or Oxford.

Stuck in their presuppositions, in spite of hearing carefully examined testimony, one part of this Greek audience gave a negative answer to the resurrection claim. They thought it unworthy of a moment's consideration. Resurrections do *not* happen. Everyone knows that. Case closed. A different group of Greeks, including two we know by name, Dionysius and Damaris, responded to Paul with a intrigued answer to the resurrection: interesting...maybe...yes! Jesus died on the Roman cross. Yes, of course he would have been entombed and it is reasonable to think that his political and religious enemies would have gone to extreme measures to ensure there was no foul play to make it appear he was alive again. Yes, the testimonies of his followers seeing him alive again exhibited the characteristics of authentic circumstances and sane first-hand accounts. In the balance, they decided that it would be more extraordinary (and irrational) to call the Apostle Paul and the other Christian leaders liars than it would be to accept that Jesus truly rose from the dead. After all, if an Almighty God exists, someone powerful enough to create life in the beginning and construct the amazing universe (even ancient peoples viewed the cosmos with awe in spite of their limited knowledge), what is it for him

¹²⁶ <https://richarddawkins.net/2014/11/the-god-delusion/>.

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to raise a dead man of his choosing to life? But could they legitimately accuse Paul and his friends of lying? Could they legitimately accuse them of delusional thinking? What basis did they have for that? The Messiah story involved too many pieces and connections to fabricate. Furthermore, it integrated key Hebrew writings and concepts that predated the life of Jesus by hundreds or thousands of years. The ability to convincingly fabricate such a fantastic story over eons lay beyond human power. Early believers used a sort of Occam's razor in their thought, going with the simplest explanation for the resurrection. Rather than diving deeper and deeper into vast conspiracy theories about crafty plots to steal or resuscitate Jesus, thoughtful people accepted the plain eye-witness testimonies. Jesus had indeed died a horrendous death, was buried and three days later rose from the dead after which he appeared to his closest associates and later up to five hundred people.

A New Body

What can this discussion about bodily resurrection from the dead tell us about free-will? We have been on a search for clarity in our understanding of the nature of the human mind. If the flesh-and-blood brain is the mind, it stands to reason that true free-will cannot exist, since at no level in the process of scientific reductionism can we identify any sort of physical agent possessing the power of choice rather than reacting in a chain of cause and effect. Groups of cells, individual cells, proteins and DNA, biochemical molecules, organic molecules, atoms, electrons and neutrons, charged states and quantum particles function with no plan, mind or will. They are—if you will—at the mercy of physical forces. Put them all together in the brain and you get more of the same. Naturalism sits uneasily in our explanations because we sense that we DO exist and that we have the power of volition.

Supposing that the written accounts of Jesus' resurrection are true,

does it give insight to the problem of free-will? The alleged facts surrounding his resurrection present us with a mixed bag of intriguing ideas. In the first centuries after Jesus lived, these ideas generated no end of philosophical and theological debate. One group of people which came to be known as the Gnostics took the position that since physical matter is inherently evil, Jesus himself as the holy one could not have been a physical man but was rather a spiritual apparition. The early church soundly denounced Gnosticism as unrooted in Biblical teaching.

Gnosticism was only one of many debates about the relationship of mind/body in the person of Jesus. The apostolic writings present Jesus as a human being composed of a physical body and spiritual mind. Jesus was the eternal *Logos* living outside of space and time. The *Logos* became a man and lived among us. The Apostle John wrote,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.¹²⁷

This introduction to John's account establishes both the existence of the *Logos* before the physical universe and his divine spiritual nature. A few sentences later John says, "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us..." As we consider the identity of Jesus, we come again to the broader question of the relationship between mind and body. Several early church councils convened to sort out the question of Jesus' humanity and divinity. In 325 AD the Nicene Creed rejected the Arian heresy. Arius taught that Jesus was an exalted god-like being, created at the beginning of time, but not eternal. Arguing in line with the scriptures, the Nicaean council confessed faith in the eternal preexistence of Jesus' spiritual nature saying, "We believe in one Lord

¹²⁷ John 1:1-3.

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Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father..."

A century later Christian leaders convened the 451 AD Chalcedon council declaring that the person of Jesus was "acknowledged in two natures, without being mixed, transmuted, divided or separated." These creedal statements sought to establish clarity about the relationships between a) the human and divine natures in Jesus and b) the physical body and spirit of Jesus. These thorny debates included notable persons who took positions not entirely in harmony with the mainstream. Anyone who cast doubt upon the absolute unity, humanity and divinity of Jesus eventually fell to the wayside as a proponent of an inadequate or incorrect theological and philosophical position. At the heart of the various creeds was the repeated assertion that Jesus was *one* person with two natures, one physical and one spiritual.

If the creeds are correct about the nature of Jesus, what happened to his mind and body in that period of roughly 40 hours he was physically dead? His dead body could no more dream than could the stone rolled over the front of his tomb. The death of Jesus was a fully human experience. Death was complete and down to the very core of his physical existence. At the instant Jesus expired on the cross, his heart beat one final time and he breathed his last, but—supposing mind/body dualism is true—his spiritual nature continued to live. His last words are plain enough, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

Mind/body dualism would imply that just like us, Jesus had authentic free-will grounded in something more than his brain. His human brain could no more have been the seat of true volition than any other human brain, since purely physical entities can only act according to the laws of physics. Furthermore, if the mind is the brain and Jesus was the incarnation of God, then Jesus' brain was the mind of God. If that were the case then who was running the universe those 40 hours

that his braindead corpse lay lifeless in the tomb?

The death of Messiah Jesus was indeed physical. But the existence of a mind independent of a brain means that his spirit continued existing with no interruption.

A Flying Body

Before the Wright Brothers, controlled human flight was a fantastic dream. Over the years some of my most memorable dreams at night have included sequences where I had the power to fly at will. Like superman, I just wished it and then suddenly I would soar upwards over the treetops and cityscapes. Beautiful dreams...nothing more. Such gravity-defying flight is the stuff of comics and fairy-tales. But weirdly enough, after his resurrection, Jesus flew. He also mysteriously appeared inside locked rooms. On one occasion he ate grilled fish with his friends. These post-resurrection appearances make the simple point that his resurrected physical body was the same and yet not the same as the one crucified on the Roman cross. After hearing claims of a dead man resurrected three days after his brutal murder, we might hardly be shocked by stories of him flying and walking through walls. If there is a God who can at will do miracles by suspending physical laws, what's the problem? Supposing a) God exists, b) he can do miracles without catastrophically collapsing the reliably law-based physical fabric of the universe, c) he took the form of human being, d) he was crucified and raised from the dead with a glorified body, there is then no rational objection to the powers of flight in Jesus.

Here is the story as told by the scholar Luke.

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand

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looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”¹²⁸

The Gospel text records that this same post-resurrection Jesus had some days earlier dined on lovely grilled fish with his friends. Eating fresh fish on the beach stirs up images of a crackling fire, gentle waves on the sand and buddies laughing about good times. How does this sentimental image square with the picture of Jesus floating away into the sky and hidden away by clouds? It's an emotional jerk, a radical shift from one of the most earthy scenes of humanity to one of fantastic supernatural power. The easy response is to chuck it aside, write it off and demythologize it as another flight into fantasy by an anonymous 1st-century story-teller. After all, didn't these weavers of tall-tales need a clever literary device to miraculously clear Jesus out of the story-line if they wanted to convince people that he hadn't run away or died as a failed Messiah? That's a convenient explanation except for those pesky early Christian leaders and followers, who insisted against tremendous social pressure, threat of harm and possible violent, torturous death that their testimony had 100% veracity. They were convinced they saw Jesus die, buried and return alive after three days. They insisted that their resurrected Messiah hung out with them in a relaxed, casual way and that he vacated this world by flying into the sky. Sound crazy? Yeah. Would the first disciples stick by their story no matter what? Certainly.

We Shall be Like Him

Regarding the nature of Jesus' body, the Apostle John wrote,

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it

¹²⁸ Act 1:9-11.

did not know him.² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears^[a] we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.—¹²⁹

In other words, Jesus has become the archetype for the future resurrected human body. The Apostle Paul in speaking about the new resurrected body said,

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.¹³⁰

Pre-Resurrection	Post-Resurrection
Corruption	Incorruption
Dishonor	Glory
Weakness	Power
Natural Body	Spiritual Body

But wait? Have we discovered an oxymoron in scripture? Paul uses the expression *spiritual body* (πνευματικός σῶμα, *pneumatikos sōma*). Isn't the *soma* the earthly substance, the flesh and blood form we have now,

¹²⁹ 1 John 3:1-3.

¹³⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:42-44.

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while the *pneumatikos* exists immaterially? Yet Jesus' post-resurrection appearances illustrate precisely what Paul is describing. Jesus exhibited both earthly, physical characteristics when he lounged with his friends around the campfire and heavenly, spiritual ones when he entered a locked room and flew into a cloud. The key point in this passage is that body and spirit are united in such a way that introduces a new relationship with reality, both in eternity and in time and space.

The Mind Needs a Body?

How can this insight help us understand the human mind? From this analysis of the nature of Jesus we do not have enough information to insist that the human mind must be embodied. God has never needed a body to live or a brain to think. Couldn't God have created humans so that our minds could go on existing forever apart from our bodies? Yet this is not what scripture teaches. It puts great importance on the body both in this life and the next. The body and mind are so closely related that one is hard pressed to make a distinction between the two. Furthermore, the scripture says that the bodies of God's people will be resurrected in the way Jesus was, so that the new bodies will be the same yet different in key aspects that empower them and eternally preserve them.

These new bodies, according to other passages of scripture, will inhabit a new heaven and new earth. The new creation will be like the old creation but born again in a marvelous new burst of beauty, purpose, and immortality. C.S. Lewis captures the drama of a freshly renewing earth at the end of time in his Narnia story *The Last Battle*.

“If you ask me,” said Edmund, “It’s like somewhere in the Narnian world. Look at those mountains ahead—and the big ice-mountains beyond them. Surely they’re rather like the mountains we used to see from Narnia, the ones up Westward beyond the Waterfall?”

“Yes, so they are,” said Peter. “Only these are bigger.”

Later in the conversation the children come to a shocking realization. The old Narnia has been transformed right before their eyes.

“Like!” cried Edmund after a moment’s silence. “Why they’re exactly like. Look, there’s Mount Pire with his forked head, and there’s the pass into Archenland and everything!”

“And yet they’re not like,” said Lucy. “They’re different. They have more colours on them and they look further away than I remembered and they’re more...more...oh, I don’t know....”

“More like the real thing, said the Lord Digory softly.¹³¹

Just like the body of Jesus, which at the same moment was oddly earthly and yet otherworldly, unrecognizable and yet recognizable, all of the physical world will be transformed into something familiar and dazzlingly new, “more like the real thing.”

In this chapter we have used a thought experiment that supposes the Gospel accounts are true in order to question the nature of the mind. If Jesus was fully God and fully man in one person during his earthly life, if he was crucified and rose from the dead three days later, if his resurrected body could transcend the laws of physics, what does that say about the mind or spirit of humans? It suggests that the relationship between mind and body is marvelous and mysterious behind our wildest imaginations. The bible says that the human body is very important, so important it will not be ultimately discarded or destroyed, but raised from death to eternal life. The immaterial mind, though separated from the body at the moment of physical death, will

¹³¹ Lewis, C.S., *The Last Battle*, 1956, pp 168-169.

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be reunited with the body at the resurrection, bringing newness, completeness and wholeness. To insist that only the brain is our mind or that the body is ultimately irrelevant is to fall short of the scriptural picture of human nature. We best understand ourselves when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus the Messiah, born of a virgin, crucified on a cross and raised to new life on the third day.



Chapter 12

To Believe or Not Believe?

Three Great Questions have captivated people from the beginning of time. Is there a God, what is the origin of all life and do we possess an immaterial self with a free-will? These questions have always deeply interested me. As a nine-year-old boy I discussed with my father how odd it is that anything exists at all. Yet how odd it would be if nothing existed! Even if nothing had existed rather than our cosmos, how strange that something that didn't exist could exist! In ninth grade my physics teacher, a no-nonsense ex-marine, sparked many lunchtime teenage conversations about black holes, interstellar space travel (this was in the 1980s when *Star Wars* was still a stunning new pop phenomenon), quantum fields and other dimensions. The short answer from secularists, "It just IS! So be quiet," didn't quite satisfy, if for no other reason than it was immensely difficult to imagine getting to the fine-tuned and precise order of both the natural world and human technology from the mindless and blank "dreams of a rock". Throw in a generous dose of entropy and the whole scenario of particles to people and molecules to machines really stretched even my

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fertile young imagination.

My freshman year at the university brought me into relationships with serious skeptics, folks with lots of letters packed behind their names and lots of brain cells packed into their skulls. They couldn't say exactly (or even vaguely) how energy fields could coalesce into the cosmological singularity or how hypothetical, randomly scattered amino acids could form a protein or a little chain of RNA or DNA coding, but they nevertheless felt far more comfortable with that scenario than the theistic alternatives (remember, "It just IS! So be quiet").

Yet being the hyper-curious creatures we are, we just can't help repeatedly asking the big questions, though they stubbornly resist certainty. This book has shown that although these three questions lack absolute certainty, they do not lack answers backed up with evidence. The problem we have come back to again and again in this book is why the evidence remains debatable. For every theist argument one can propose an atheistic counterargument. For every intelligent design argument is a non-intelligent evolutionary argument. For every gap in the fossil record is a fossil that looks like it might be a link in the chain of common descent.¹³² For every free-will argument is a determinism argument. These arguments fuel endless thoughtful (and thoughtless) articles and essays and informal blogs and internet rants.

When observing suffering or injustice I'm sometimes moved to ask the oft-heard question, "If I were God, would I have created the world this way?" Overcome by the problem of evil the atheist asserts that only a miracle like finding the word YHWH etched into the universal DNA code would satisfy the burden of proof for a creator. The theist counters it's enough to observe billions of pieces of information

¹³² I'm speaking in hyperbole here. In reality there are far more gaps in the fossil record than links.

already coded into DNA. A doubter asserts that only if we could reliably and regularly communicate with spirits of the physically deceased could we then say that immaterial selves exist. The theist brings forth hundreds of testimonies of an afterworld from people resuscitated from dead. The legal system judges and punishes theft as though the perpetrator is a free moral agent. The determinist says that the thief is not truly guilty because he had no freedom of choice.

What would it take to persuade me—or you—that God exists or not, that we are products of chance or design, that we have an immortal spirit or that we will cease to exist the moment our brains die? Like jury members in a murder trial, we shoulder an immense burden of judgment which determines life or death. We consider the eloquent arguments of the prosecutor and defense. Witnesses take the stand one by one, presumably upholding their sworn oath to absolute honesty. Both sides produce pieces of hard evidence and no matter how abundant or scanty the evidence, we are forced to draw some weighty conclusions. What does that fingerprint on the doorknob mean? Why did the accused murderer empty his bank account at the ATM the night before? Did the witness correctly hear someone say, “we’re done” or was it “on the run”? Science can take the court case just so far. As a juror, we watch for subtle cues in the eyes of the witnesses, the voice of the defense lawyer, the body language of the accused. Every line of inquiry must be explored. Every epistemological method is applied. How do we know the truth? We draw on everything we can to make the right decision. We might not become absolutely convinced of the guilt or innocence of the accused but we must become persuaded above a reasonable doubt if the justice system is to work properly.

Why would God put us in this awkward position? Why would he put the question of his own existence in the dock? Does he hide himself from us so no one feels coerced to believe? This argument has much to commend it. The story of Romeo and Juliet may be the most

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famous love story in the world. Why? Because the love of these two teenagers is entirely free of coercion. They love one another in spite of countless obstacles. Though lost in unnecessary tragedy, their love compels them to give everything for the other. Does God reveal himself just enough but no more so we must choose to trust him completely free of feelings of obligation and control?

As humans, far from God's equal, perhaps we also need regular—if not daily—reminders of our humble position in the great scheme of things. At the end of his great Middle Earth adventure, in which he played no small part, Bilbo Baggins is gently chastised by Gandalf for his exaggerated self-importance.

“Then the prophecies of the old songs have turned out to be true, after a fashion!” said Bilbo.

“Of course!” said Gandalf. “And why should they not prove true? Surely you don't disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit? You are a very fine person, Mr. Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!”

“Thank goodness!” said Bilbo laughing, and handed him the tobacco-jar.

God is never named in *The Hobbit*, at least not explicitly. In Gandalf's and Bilbo's words however, we see a hint to his existence. Bilbo, like a good secular materialist, celebrates himself and his “luck” which has brought him safely through certain death. On hindsight, he thinks these prophecies were never pre-designed and probably had as much a chance for success as failure. That he escaped goblin torments, survived certain death and witnessed the death of Smaug was just good

luck. Gandalf will have none of that smack. No, Bilbo was not lucky and he certainly was not the center of the story. Indeed, he is “quite a little fellow in a wide world after all.” Bilbo repents. His reply might better have been “Thank God!” Our investigation all comes together in Bilbo’s closing effusion of gratitude. God exists and he is good. He designs and predestines everything according to his perfect character and plans. Luck is a myth. We really are quite little ladies and fellows in a wide world after all. That’s for certain.



Postscript

“What must I do to be saved?” A certain 1st century Roman jailer put this question to Paul in the city of Philippi. Contentious events had landed Paul and his traveling partner Silas in the Philippi prison. The Christian message stirred up hope and hostility everywhere it went. Local authorities reasoned, what better way to stop the message from spreading than imprisoning the messengers?

The full account of the story is found in Acts 16. While Paul and Silas sat in chains singing and praising God, an earthquake suddenly shook the city. The jailer feared that the prisoners under his charge had escaped so he lifted his sword to end his life. Seeing the jailer, Paul shouted, “Stop!” Marveling at these men of faith, courage and character, the jailer wanted what they had. “What must I do to be saved?”

The answer was simple. No rules. No religiosity. No uncertainties. Paul said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”¹³³ Let’s break this down.

¹³³ Acts 16:31

1. Believe means to trust something, to have confidence, to commit, to begin a relationship. As we have seen, believing has a rational and personal component.
2. The Lord Jesus. Packed into this title Lord is the idea that Jesus, the son of God, satisfied God's moral requirements perfectly. He lived a perfect life in our place and then suffered in our place for the punishment of our sins. He rose from the dead and reigns over all the cosmos. Faith in the Lord Jesus means accepting his forgiveness for our sins and his perfect plan for our lives.
3. Saved. Our moral failures, spiritual deficiencies and selfishness creates hostility between us and God. The consequence is two-fold. First sinfulness makes life in this world hard. It disrupts and corrupts everything. We let ourselves down, let others down and worst of all we let God down. Secondly this moral brokenness, if left unforgiven and unresolved will carry on into eternity. A person cannot shake his fist at God all his life and expect a handshake on the doorstep of heaven. When we trust Jesus, he saves us from sin today, tomorrow and forever. Life is made new. We receive a new destiny.

Here is a simple prayer for the believing heart:

“Lord Jesus. I believe in you and accept you into my life. Please forgive my sin, renew my heart to love you, set me on a new path and when I die someday, receive me to yourself as my loving Savior. Thank you for dying in my place so I can have new life and resurrection from the dead. Amen.”

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author has studied in the laboratory and in the library. The scientific method got started by people who believed that the universe had meaning and purpose. They believed in laws because they believed in a lawgiver. Following this line of reasoning, Dr. Wright has studied with the hope of learning the truth. We shall know the truth and the truth shall set us free.

Questions to Ponder:

1. Why should anyone care about these 3 Great Questions?
2. In the last century what was the major shift in cosmology regarding the age of the universe?
3. What does the fear of absolute, existential isolation say about the nature of the human consciousness?
4. If the universe is blind, pitiless and amoral (without any moral structure of right and wrong) how can humans make objective moral judgments or judge others who disagree?

5. Is it objectively possible to ascribe value, praise-worthiness and meaning to humanity's greatest achievements if the universe and everything it contains is doomed to a certain entropic death or does it mean that "purpose" is a subjective and relative state of mind?

6. What hope can people have of speaking rationally about the existence of God, traditionally understood as all-good and all-powerful?

7. If God does exist, why do some people report being strongly persuaded and others not?

8. Of the great people of history briefly studied in part one, who stands out to you as having the most rationally and emotionally coherent life? Who has the least?

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9. Who inspires you the most toward a life that demonstrates the pursuit of lasting (perhaps eternal?) value?

10. What evidence for and against the current neo-Darwinian theory of life origins do you find most convincing? What are its greatest strengths and weaknesses?

11. Do you agree with the idea that Darwin's theory of evolution can make for a satisfied atheist?

12. If Darwin's evolutionary model (mutation and natural selection) were the actual process for the origin of all species, should that cause a crisis of faith for a theist?

13. Can you envision a scientific model of life origins which incorporates research principles of identifying intelligent design in the same way that archeology and forensic science try to discern intelligent design?

14. What are the greatest scientific and theological issues that arise when humans try to understand the history of life on planet earth?

15. Is it a realistic expectation that as humanity advances in scientific knowledge and understanding we will someday have complete answers to all questions?

16. Take a few moments to look inwardly (personal reflection) and then describe your sense of personhood.

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17. When you deeply engage a close friend or family member in conversation, what do you experience in that encounter of persons?

18. If you have ever entered into deep, personal connection with another human, can you contrast that interaction with the way you might relate to a pet dog, a goldfish, a tree, a boulder, a grain of sand?

20. Describe the experience of having wishes, dreams, hopes, wants, desires, needs and a will.

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NOTES:

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