

APOLOGIA



Is there a God?

And if so, can anyone prove it?

There are innumerable proofs for the existence of God, but somehow, not everyone believes in Him. It's odd, but one's man's proof is another man's yawn, that's what I find. So I no longer expect to persuade anyone else; but this is the way I persuaded myself when I was confused. Maybe you will find it interesting. My father did.

Logical doesn't mean absolute

Let us understand from the outset that this proof, while perfectly logical, is not absolutely watertight, and since the great mathematician Godel has shown (I. e. really proved) that such tightness is not possible even for a mathematical system, we will not attribute gullibility to those who accept it. But it is reasonable to ask of those who reject it that they state in clear terms which of its assumptions they have chosen to reject. Or if they accept all the assumptions, we can ask on what basis they reject the argument.

Here are the Assumptions:

- 1) That the physical world is really there: that grass is green and that (most) trees have wooden trunks, that stones are mineral formations, that animals have sentient life, and so forth.
- 2) That men are intelligent and are fulfilled (in part) by the exercise of their intelligence, correctly learning, for example, that grass is green and roses are red, that mountains are built of stone by natural processes, and that snakes have a sense of smell, just as we do.
- 3) That goodness is a issue of character, of personal development, that is rightly recognized and valued by great human beings, and only denied or disvalued by men who are at best foolish, and at worst, well, beastly, criminal... wicked.
- 4) That no effect can be greater than its cause, which is practically a tautology, but we will not argue that. This relationship between cause and effect is so universally obvious that when we see an effect greater than its apparent cause, we immediately look for further causes. So, for example, when an avalanche is greater than the shout that causes it, we understand that there were vast instabilities in the structure of the snowfield, and the shout only had to activate them.

By Accident?

So here we are, and we are intelligent, and Darwin says we came from the bacteria, step by step, by accident. Indeed, says he, we were composed accident by accident. Well, as a householder, I know something about accidents. If my house could be put in order accident by accident, I would be featured, weekly, on the cover of House Beautiful. What Darwin has done is to cover the absurdity of his proposition by putting together enough teensy weensy steps in which the effect is very slightly greater than the cause so that it is never very much greater and the mind does not immediately rebel as it would if he just put four bacteria on the table and asked Mr. Snodgrass to shuffle them into a Mozart.

Once you see that side of Darwinism -- that he has hidden his absurdity in a multiplicity of absurdities that seem too small to complain about -- you recognize your need to reconsider the matter.

So...

Where did you come from? If no effect is greater than its cause, you have to have an intelligent designer putting you together. Whether you call it God or Mother Nature, or ID or anything else, the first point is simply that there's something out there which is smarter than you, and is, or holds, your true point of origin.

Whence goodness?

How can you be sure the Big Cause is personal? Well, I'm not sure it makes sense to call anything intelligent which is not also personal, but in any case, we have the same argument as before, on a different level in this matter. The greatest reality in our lives is love. We honor those we love, and we disdain the giving of honor to men or women who are selfish, brutish, without love. It is true that we may honor someone whose love is too disciplined to be obvious; but if someone is actually cruel, or even solidly indifferent to the personal realm, we distrust or despise him. So, not only our intelligence, but our goodness is an important dimension of our greatness and of our judgment of greatness. Does our goodness come from bacteria?

Darwin and Gould may say it does, primarily because they adopt the position that there is no such thing as goodness, but only a survival value to giving a certain amount of attention to others' desires. This is simply claptrap. The type of calculation it implies is completely foreign to our actual notions of goodness, and we immediately despise anyone whose good behavior towards us turns out to be deliberately calculated for his own gain. So if real goodness is merely an unconscious calculation of gain, instead of a deliberate one, it is merely stupider than the type of calculation that we definitely regard as selfish and at least relatively evil. In short, goodness, from the Darwin/Gould perspective, is, if not actually evil, merely stupid or not a reality. Contrary to assumption #3 above.

No. Good people value the human person, and we place that value so high that anyone who subordinates the valuing of the human person to money or political gain is despised, or at least considered less than "good."

So again, did this value come from the bacteria? And if not, then who designed it in us?

It just happened

The pagan will answer that it doesn't have to have been designed; it just happened. I am not going to argue with this concept, which is hardly worthy of the name concept. I will simply say that it is contrary to my fourth assumption. Reject that assumption, and go your merry way. I do not think that any rational person actually rejects that assumption in his daily life; I will claim that those (many) who reject it in their philosophical lives are leading double lives, philosophically. But I recognize that many people do reject it because the philosophical fashion of our time is of such a temper. But show me the man who would not be surprised to see two gallons of milk coming out of a one-gallon carton, and I will show you someone who can consistently claim not to believe that effects must be proportionate to, never more and generally less than, their causes. Then I will run for my life, before he decides to burn my house for no particular reason.

Love and Intelligence Together??

If we grant that our character of valuing the person is from a greater designer, then the question is whether that designer is the same as the one who designed our intelligence. That is, is the intelligent designer the same as the source of personal love? The famous way of putting this question is whether the God of the philosophers is the same as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Surely you can see that if the Intelligent Designer did not design for love, he was blind in some way, and to the degree that he designed personal creatures without meaning to design anything but smart ones, he designed something greater than himself.

Oops. He has become the cause of an effect greater than his own reality.

Well, maybe it's the other way: the love designer came up with intelligence by accident.

Oops; that's not reasonable. Reason can't be the result of accident.

We are both personal and intelligent. Although some people lose their kindness while they develop their minds, and though some people do stupid things in the name of sentimental love, the truth is that high intelligence and great love can harmonize completely and are mutually serviceable and reciprocally admirable. We could have one designer who was both intelligent and personal, and this is the only sensible conclusion, for any other solution has Causes which are less than their Effects. Even though not everybody concludes that the First Cause must be both the Philosophic and the Personal and Good First Cause, even the First Father of all Persons, it is the only reasonable conclusion. Those who hold a different idea have rejected one of my assumptions, usually #4.

But they do not openly reject it; they just don't think about it, because Darwin's way is the fashion in which effects can be "a little bit" greater than their causes. Just a teeny bit, adding up.

But from my perspective, the First Cause is personal, smart, and bigger than all of us; more loving than any of us; able to design us: God, by whatever name you choose.

Picking a Religion

Would there be a reason for choosing the Christian idea of God?

First of all, the religions of the West have primacy when it comes to offering a comprehensive view of reality that takes both physical reality and philosophical truth into account. The religions of the East are quite ready, philosophically, to dispense with my first assumption, and often discard the second as well. That is, they are not at all sure the world is real, and supposing it is, they are not sure of their own reality as observers of it. This does not prevent them from having gardens where they expectantly plant seeds; it does not prevent them from liking roses or climbing mountains. They would actually be quite surprised to see a green rose; they would be astonished if a mountain became a marshmallow. But, philosophically, they regard these human expectations as spiritually aberrant, and try to overcome them. For many generations, until the coming of Christianity, this held them back as physicists. Seriously.

Christians also have primacy in their understanding of love. The Hindu religion, for example, has this idea of karma, by which they mean that the lives we begin at birth are shaped by the virtue and sin of a previous life. Like original sin, this idea of karma addresses the apparent injustice of the differences in individual human circumstances, and gives a spiritual answer, rather than a merely Darwinian: "That's your accident."

Very well. But there is a difference between karma and original sin, because if your present sufferings are karmic justice, then there is no virtue in my relieving your sufferings; you will only have to suffer more in the next incarnation. Best to leave you in your pain.

What a comfortable religion for a selfish man!

Comfortable, but not loving. Love reaches out. To be honest, individual Hindus can be generous and virtuous, as Mahatma Gandhi was, but generous love is not something that is definitively bound to their religious faith. Hinduism is not defined; it defies definition, because it defies assumption #1.

The Buddhists are universally kind, but they are not clear about the personal nature of God. It is a philosophical failure. It has to do with assumption #2. They are not sure they are real.

The Moslem faith is not clear about the humanity of those who are outside it, or, for that matter, of the humanity of the women inside it, who are so profoundly inferior to men that there can be no philosophical discussion of human nature as a fundamental reality, since human nature is certainly shared equally by men and women. Because Islam is not clear about the humanity of those on the outside, Islam cannot respect the conscience of an unbeliever, and this makes sure that there will be insincere adherents. It is not a faith, but a conquest, in that sense. You cannot unite spiritual authority and police power without compromising the sincerity of your following.

Can't be done.

Christianity Then

So we are left with Christianity as the faith with the strongest potential hold on philosophical consistency. What about Catholic and non-Catholic Christianity? Are they equal? Catholics have so many rules! This cannot be in keeping with the simple teaching of Jesus.

Can it?

Well, the reason that non-Catholics have so few rules is that every believer is his own pope, and his church construct dies with him. If he is very smart and good, other believers will take a few blocks from his building plan for their little ecclesiae, but they do so as personal popes, not as a faithful congregation. No very great edifice can be built in this circumstance. Only Catholics believe that God is with this people in such a way that the past provides a foundation and we can build right upon it.

That's why the non-Catholic Christians gave in on abortion. They didn't all give in, but all the large churches did because they all had to respect the beliefs of their pan-papal congregations who were split. The little ones who didn't give in were those with little popes who were able to persuade or collect congregations whose mini-papacies were aligned with their own. That's all.

Let's go back for a moment to the idea of God.

He's the Intelligent Designer and the Great Lover. And He (or she) is a person. Maybe a few persons; we haven't tackled the Trinity yet.

Does God Reveal Himself?

God is love; we said that.

Love Self-Reveals

But one thing is characteristic of love: the desire to be in a reciprocal relationship. A lover is not content to be in love, but wants the beloved to know about it and respond if by any persuasion this is possible. A lover may be shy, but in the end, self-revelation is of the essence of love, because without it love cannot be returned and cannot grow as a relationship.

So if God is love (or loving, or a loving person or persons) then He (or She) will be self-revealing.

I am going to use the masculine pronoun from now on. I will do another essay on why I choose to do so, but for now, let me just claim that one pronoun is more convenient than two, so that is how it will be today.

So God will be self-revealing, and since I know how possible it is to fail to teach someone to make

pancakes*, let alone teach someone to know my heart, I will not be quick to judge God by the occasional foolishness of people who make credible claims to having received his self-revelation but then say massively peculiar things about him. If their revelatory claims are reasonable, I will try to understand, from what I do know about God, about pancake making, and about my own heart, I will try to understand, as I say, whether they might be saying a true thing in a clumsy manner.

It is by this means that I have come to appreciate the Bible, and in particular how I have come to appreciate the claim of the Church to have received the potentially exclusive right to interpret this rather eclectic and sometimes chaotic document. I say “potentially exclusive” because the Church does not forbid her children to read the Bible and interpret it as the Holy Spirit teaches them so long as they remain within her framework.

So when I read something that seems mighty odd to me, I think it okay to consider what the saints thought about it. And if it still seems to me that the story must be a little garbled, I consider how a pancake recipe* can become garbled, and am willing to allow that this is an account of a real revelation which I might perhaps have perceived and recounted differently had it been my own experience.

How differently? And what is the use of a revelatory account that is garbled?

What is revelation good for?

The use of any account is that we are challenged to think about God, and to think about our own experience and its meaning. What we learn is that there are some experiences with God that we may have misunderstood or dismissed, only because our expectations of what God may do among men are so limited. The use of the Catholic account, as a guide, is that the silliest confusions are edited out. At the same time, there is a common-sense recognition that even among good members of a faith community, differences of personal, social and family background are going to lead to differences in our understanding of God and thus possibly to differences in our relationship with Him.

Think about this in simple terms. Different people perceive me differently, and I behave differently towards different people because of the way they approach me, and what they value. I don't talk geology with people who are threatened by my intelligence; I talk about knitting. I may not talk about my faith experience with people who are so private about their own that mine would make them uncomfortable. I am complex; God is infinitely more complex, does many more things, thinks many more thoughts, and has a much more detailed library of ways to respond to different people. So we have to allow that people may have different accounts of him, even real accounts of real encounters.

And God is simple

Nevertheless, God is simple. God is love. He is not hateful; he is not impatient, rude, or selfish. He has opinions about which there is no negotiation, but His defense of His thought is never, ultimately, angry, however firm. It is always love, and if it looks angry, (let us pause to consider this important example) that may be because most people do not have the personal experience of dealing with a loving defense of ideas about which there is no negotiation. Anger may be the only word in their natural vocabulary for the holding of uncompromising opinions. Definitive opinions and angry ones may never have been distinguished. One must think about such simple things in order to understand the doctrine of God's thought as revealed in the Scriptures.

Miracles

Now I want to talk about miracles.

I have always thought miracles were important. I guess God does too, since he keeps on providing them

Miracles are the word to Thomas, whom God loves and does not despise. There is a blessedness that Thomas does not share, or did not at one time, a type of faith experience which is good and which he missed at a certain point in his life. I don't see that this made him any different from the other apostles who also didn't believe until they saw Jesus; they just saw Jesus sooner. But regardless of that, Thomas was honest. He laid out the honest requirements of his very plain mind, and Jesus responded to his actual needs. He does the same for us. People who need to "see" have been provided with a supply of miracles, including ongoing miracles, so they can find any reasonable amount of assurance.

But they must be honest. They must not up new demands each time one demand is met, saying that after all what they asked was only small and silly compared to the reality they are being asked to face. They must be like Thomas, and believe when they see.

The Tilma

One of my favorite miracles is the character and even the existence of the tilma on which we have the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It is still around, and it is still made of a cactus fiber that should decay in 20 years starting from any point you choose since 1531. In case that miracle seems old now, (though it is not, for each 20 years is another a miracle) the latest discovery is that the paint mystery – the question about what medium was used to make this image -- has moved into a new realm. It is not oil, not watercolor, and not egg tempera; so much we knew. What then?

Heh! There is no pigment. It is structural color, iridescence. This is absolutely stunning, because it means the work is done on a microscopic level, like butterfly wings, completely outside the reach of any painter, certainly outside even the conceptual reach of a 16th century painter in Mexico.

Ultimate low entropy

Now I'm not forgetting my miracle, but let me say something about the Big Bang. This is an important topic because the beginning of the universe is so astonishing. For many years, perhaps for most of history before Galileo, it was assumed that the heavens were made of a different matter than the earth. Even after Galileo, there was a long period of doubt about whether there was a single universe out there or several. The discovery that the Andromeda nebula was 2.5 million light years away was so breathtaking that our sister galaxy was considered, perhaps, another universe, not merely another galaxy in single universe with full gravitational interaction as we now know it.

But now we do know: there is only one universe, and it has an age of just several billion years, not an infinite age, not even a trillion years. Just one or a few dozen billion or so.

But the character of the universe as a whole is that entropy, the disordering of energy, is constantly increasing, and this means that when you go backwards towards creation, you are going to the point where the First Cause imparted a zero entropy (or close to zero) -- an ultimate order on the material universe. The ability to put entropy at zero is not accidental, for zero entropy is the very reverse of accidental. Growing entropy is growth of randomness, due to an accidental character in the motions of a system. So we may call the First Cause and Creator, the Lord of Entropy; He alone has power to make a thing that has zero entropy, and though we know of no process that reverses entropy without borrowing from "outside the system", we may reasonably believe that the Lord of Entropy could, if he chose, reverse its otherwise inevitable growth.

Entropy misses the tilma

Back to Guadalupe. That the image that does not decay is in violation of the law of increasing entropy. That's the point. The escape from physical decay is an escape from entropy. Nobody, but nobody, does that but the Guy behind the Big Bang, the Zero Entropy Event.

As for the iridescence, the one who made butterflies can do that with ease, but nobody else is decorating that way. A very crude and general use of iridescence is employed in modern times, to make oxidized niobium for jewelry. Not close to a butterfly wing. Not even contemplating cactus fiber as a medium.

Where is all this going?

We are here:

- There is a First Cause God, who would cause as much by any other name.
- He is also the First Lover.
- He is the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- He is the God of all believers, but he cannot, in the nature of their primary assumptions and belief systems, be properly understood by all of them all of the time. He can be understood by most of them some of the time, and some of them most of the time. That's all.
- He might be the God of the Catholic Church, the only group that has a consistent ability to philosophize.
- He alone could be the God of Our Lady of Guadalupe and of the Big Bang and of St. Thomas, and so of Jesus and of the Catholic Church.

QED.