

ISSUE

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THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
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Faithful Sayings

August 4,
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Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Justin Smiley
Kevin Wise
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



There Is a God: Making the Case for Belief

By Steve Wolfgang

Paul, an apostle, reminded a pagan audience that, having created the universe, God has **“permitted all the nations to go their own ways, yet He did not leave Himself without witness”** (Acts 14:15-17). That **“witness”** appears in too many categories and manifestations to develop in one short article—but those many different forms of evidence in fact may be an argument in itself.

To use a metaphor, a good worldview resembles a stage production with various kinds of lighting placed at different angles around the stage. The stage is not lit by a single brilliant spotlight (though there are spotlights). The full illumination from all of the lights—footlights, sidelights, back-lighting, overhead lighting, spotlights, etc.) illuminates the stage. Not all the lights are equally powerful, and none individually may cover the entire light spectrum. But, when all the lights are on, one can see what’s on stage very clearly. Depending on each person’s location in the audience, proximity to the stage, eyesight, and other considerations, some lighting may be more effective than others.

So it is with the evidence for the existence of God. Some people are more moved by a hymn than a syllogism; others more by a formal dissertation than poetry. Someone with an engineering background might find certain kinds of argumentation more effective than, say, a musician, while someone trained in the liberal arts or humanities might find a different approach more persuasive. Still others, perhaps with little formal training, but with experience in the “university of hard knocks,” might be convinced by an altogether different approach which might not appeal to someone else.

Probably none of the “classical proofs” of God, or related arguments from “natural theology,” can establish absolutely, or to anyone’s complete satisfaction, the existence of God. Indeed, if there was a single ironclad, irrefutable proof, established by evidence, logic, and reason alone, what would be the role of faith? This is neither a resort to blind faith, totally unsupported by any evidence, nor an acknowledgment of the common concept that faith is somehow illogical. In reality, it is an appeal to a broad array of evidence from a variety of sources which provide a firm basis for faith. It is simply an acknowledgment that it will take a number of “cross-lights” to illumine the stage, just as, to invoke another metaphor, it takes multiple strands to make a rope.

Evidence from the stars overhead to the grass underfoot, and other indications of design in nature and the God who designed it (see Rom. 1:18-23), has been sufficient to convince even confirmed and outspoken atheists such as Sir Antony Flew, among others. But, the “classical proofs” which have been proposed and debated for centuries by professional philosophers like Flew—categories with impressive names (e.g., cosmological, teleological, ontological,

or other deductive arguments including moral/aesthetic evidence)—are convincing to some people, but not always effective with others. For some people, they may provide a means of clearing the “foreground” of various impediments to belief.

One of the “classical proofs” in particular has found renewed traction in the modern scientific era. The “intelligent design” (ID) movement has provided fresh empirical evidence in nature to convince even seasoned atheists like Flew. Stated as a form of the teleological argument, the “intelligent design” movement maintains that certain biological structures and processes (for instance, bacterial flagella or the human blood-clotting system) are difficult to account for using the gradual incremental process demanded by either orthodox Darwinian theory or modern neo-Darwinism. Like a mousetrap, all of the elements must be in place for these biological mechanisms to function. If any of their elements is absent, the other elements are simply useless, conferring no advantage over other organisms, and indeed, may prove disadvantageous. Whatever elements might be in place would confer no survival advantage to the organism possessing them unless all the elements were in place and functionally related, or organized. In such cases, intermediate developmental changes would not have conferred any traits making the organism better adapted for survival and the passing on of its genes. The only rational way to account for the extraordinary and irreducible complexity seen in living things is to grant the existence of an Organizing Intelligence.

For some, it is more effective to begin with perhaps the most obvious evidence of design and a designer—man himself. One need not necessarily begin with the Biblical assumptions that man is made in God’s image (Gen. 1:27, or that humans are **“fearfully and wonderfully made”** (Ps. 139:14). Only someone with scrambled eggs for brains could deny that he or she exists. So what does evidence from the most studied organisms on the planet—humankind—indicate? Deep down, nearly everyone seems convinced that he is not simply some grand accident of random atoms and molecules, but that there must be some purpose and meaning to his life. Even hardened criminals will insist on their “rights”—even, in bizarre cases, the “right to die.” Alternative explanations, including various macro-evolutionary theories, do not satisfactorily explain such things. While often purporting to explain how life—including human life—began, at best such theories might explain how it all got “rearranged.”

Another line of evidence which some find powerfully convincing is from the Bible itself, especially the Hebrew Scriptures which Christians know as

the Old Testament. God indeed has not left Himself without witness, revealing Himself in mighty acts throughout Israelite history—in persons, events, and circumstances often in accordance with what is now known from archaeology and other historical evidence.

The greatest historical or empirical proof of God’s existence is, of course, God Himself who came to earth as the Lord Jesus Christ. In His arresting teaching, His impeccable character, His good deeds, and all His other attributes, Jesus describes for us in person not only perfect humanity, but gives us the best close-up look possible at what deity itself is like—God in the flesh.

His life and teaching aside, the resurrection of Jesus is crucial. Christianity is the only religion that has an explicitly stated manner of “falsification.” In other words, it tells us, up front, how to disprove it (cf. 1 Cor. 15:14, 17). This is significant, because it turns the entire worldview on its head, standing it on one startling assertion. If disproven, the whole structure collapses. See if you can get a Buddhist or Muslim—or an atheist!—to provide a similar statement of falsification. A careful examination of the existing evidence and various alternatives convinces many that the resurrection is indeed true. In fact, the best alternative explanation—that the disciples stole the body of Jesus—acknowledges that there was no body in Jesus’s tomb after the third day!

One approach to the question which I find persuasive since it incorporates elements of many of the concepts already discussed, is what may be called an argument from “reasonableness”—which is more likely to explain what we know as humans? This is not the sort of iron-clad, red-meat, “absolute proof” that some seek. After all, if that sort of slam-dunk proof existed, there would probably be far fewer atheists and agnostics! The argument goes like this:

(A) It is reasonable, based on the evidence, that God might exist. (B) It is reasonable to think God may have communicated with human beings. (C) The world’s religions are a reasonable place to look for evidence of such communication.

(D) Among the spokespersons of the world’s religions, Jesus of Nazareth is, almost by consensus, the person most likely to provide convincing evidence of God. In some way or other, Jesus is revered, respected, or incorporated into all major world religions. If all the

world’s religious leaders were locked in a room until they could choose only one person to represent the best of their beliefs—Jesus would be the only person all could agree upon.

(E) The resurrection of Jesus is a reasonable explanation for the existence and growth of Christianity, as distinct from Judaism. (F) If the resurrection is true, then Jesus’s statements about Himself, God, truth, sin, death—the whole Christian worldview—are therefore true by deduction. Based on this conclusion, a relationship with God can exist, through Jesus Christ.

Finally, viewed on the basis of “Pascal’s wager,” while one must await eventual verification of this conclusion after death, Christians haven’t lost anything, even if wrong. Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician and scientist, inventor of the world’s first working computer (and vacuum cleaner!). He argued that when there is no absolute “proof” of something important, we choose to believe (“wager”) what is most reasonable to think, or do. For example, if someone tells you that your house is on fire, do you believe him? What are the stakes if you disregard the claim? Or do you investigate and respond accordingly?

While I don’t like the “wager” analogy, Pascal’s argument is often stated in those terms: (1) If we “wager” (choose to believe) that

God exists, and we are wrong, we lose nothing. (2) If, however, we “wager” that God exists and we are correct, the payoff is inestimable. (3) If we wager that there is no God and we are right, what have we gained—or lost? (4) But, if we “wager” there is no God, and we are wrong, we lose all—indeed, much more than all! (5) Therefore, even if the argument is not flawless, it leads to a position that bests all others. And, in fact, we are “wagering” our eternal destiny in terms of our beliefs and behaviors.

Some find Pascal’s approach to be a weak and unconvincing strategy; others (including Pascal, obviously) held it to be exceedingly powerful, indeed, the strongest avenue to faith. The same varied analysis would likely hold for other sorts of argumentation (e.g., the ontological argument) for God’s existence.

A “supporting” argument suggests itself in the personal experiences of many people who match what Jesus describes and promises, providing personal verification of the truth of Christianity. NOTE: While personal experience “proves” nothing, it is important when personal experi-

ence matches the experience described in the Bible. To take only one example, when the Bible says we are persons made in God’s image, but fallen into sin, this has tremendous explanatory power for what we see in actual human beings. Furthermore, it beats the socks off any other view of human nature.

Personal experience also plays a powerful role in disbelief. Many witnesses over the centuries have observed that one of the main reasons why many reject the various evidences for God’s existence is that to truly come to obedient faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) would demand a radical change in behavior and lifestyle which many unbelievers are loathe to adopt.

Ultimately, the God revealed in the Bible provides the only adequate explanation for a cluster of central life-questions, including, but not limited to the following: the existence of the universe, order in the universe, the human mind and consciousness, the universal desire for happiness and personal fulfillment, morality, and, ultimately, Jesus Christ Himself.

ADDENDUM: For any skeptics who may read this, I realize that many of the arguments stated here could be challenged in a number of ways (though many of those counter-arguments are massively defective). Rather than being unaware of these objections, or ignorant of rejoinders, it is simply the case that I and many others find them deficient and ineffective.

SOURCES: Much of the content of this article has been cribbed shamelessly through the years from books, articles, and other diverse sources such as Arlie J. Hoover (*Dear Agnos: The Case for Christian Theism*), Josh McDowell (*Evidence That Demands a Verdict*), Lee Strobel (*The Case For Christ*), various books and articles by Peter Kreeft, blog articles from “Internet Monk” Michael Spencer, and articles and conversations with my friend and classmate Phil Roberts—the latter two, unfortunately, untimely deceased.

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