

**WHY
BELIEVE
IN
GOD?**

by Russell Collins

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD?

Introduction

We cannot prove the existence of God. Belief in God, as the Scriptures tell us, is a matter of faith. The apostle Paul defines faith for us as "*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*" (Hebrews 11:1; RSV). The apostle further tells us that "*without faith it is impossible to please Him. For whosoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.*" (Hebrews 11:6; RSV).

One of the most commonly asked questions in discussions about God, particularly among university students, is 'How can we prove the existence of God?' This question takes the wrong approach to the matter, since it pre-supposes that we are able to prove that God does exist. It is reasonable to assume that if God exists He would want us to know that He exists. A better question therefore is 'How does God reveal His existence to us?' From this question arises the need to look for evidence of God's existence.

The question 'Why believe in God?' is probably the key question in the awareness of man and his need to understand his place in the universe; and in the search for and examination of evidence of God's existence, it must be accepted that such efforts are to be completely honest.

Starting from the point that man is an intelligent being, our intelligence imposes upon us the moral obligation to be intelligent; the obligation which was formulated in an essay by John Erskine (1879-1951), an eminent American educator, novelist and musician. The intelligent pursuit of this matter requires a diligent search for evidence and a logical examination of it. This will lead to conclusions that should be unequivocal, and must therefore be accepted; or to results that contain doubt and therefore require more evidence for their resolution.

In essence we must "*prove (verify) all things*" as we are exhorted by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

The moral obligation to be intelligent thus becomes a commitment to finding the truth, and it precludes supposition, superstition and emotion. Seeking the truth precludes even belief, for anyone may believe something that is incorrect; while something that has been proved to be true has to be believed, even when believing is difficult.

In examining the evidence to verify any matter, the fundamental and essential criterion is that the evidence is both necessary and sufficient to prove the matter, or argument. When there is further evidence to be considered it should be in harmony with the conclusions based upon the evidence which of itself is necessary and sufficient.

THE EVIDENCE

Of Ourselves

Man's intelligence is considered to be the reasoned application of knowledge by the mind, which is considered to be a function of the brain. With the mind man can think, which prompted Rene Descartes to say, 'I think; therefore I am (exist)'. The mind perceives and defines the reality of things. Through the senses the world around us becomes real: what is seen is real (exists) to the beholder; what is heard, felt, tasted and smelled is real. The mind also enables things to be described and classified. Furthermore, the mind enables man to perceive things that are abstract or unreal. For example, we classify things to be good or bad, beautiful or ugly and so on. The mind can also devise relationships between things, and this is shown most clearly in mathematics; both in pure mathematics such as algebra, and in applied mathematics, which is the basis of empirical science and of engineering. In a similar manner unreal things are invented by the mind and expressed mainly in stories of fiction and fantasy.

In spite of the astonishing facility of the mind of man, the true nature and function of the mind is unknown, suggesting that there is something behind the reality of the world of thought that we perceive with the mind.

Some General Observations

Ancient writings such as Sumerian and Babylonian, as well as Egyptian hieroglyphics, seemed at one time to be indecipherable until certain discoveries, such as the Rosetta Stone, enabled scholars to decipher them. These ancient markings can be understood because they were made by people like us, with minds like our own, who expressed themselves in their own language. They differ from the scribbles produced by very young children and chimpanzees, which do not have language.

In the world of nature, the sun, the planets, the earth, clouds, thunder, lightning, volcanoes, animals and plants, functions of the animal body, chemical elements and their reactions, the laws of heat, light and sound are not a meaningless jumble of indecipherable ideas, but have been examined with intelligence and have been found to show interdependence and harmony, thus revealing the marks of a vast Intellect. Advanced studies in genetics also reveal this.

This far-reaching recognition that so many features of nature can be studied and understood using our thought processes implies that there is behind them a superior mind which functions by processes similar to those of our own minds.

Mind does not float free in space; it is not in rock nor in plant life, but is linked with human personality. We know of great thinkers and artists by their work. The thinkers and artists may be remote from us in time or distance or both, but we know something about them, perhaps a lot about them, by their work.

However, our minds are very limited. We cannot think out any great improvement in our bodies that would make life easier, or change our bodies in any manner to our advantage. We can develop and strengthen our muscles by exercise, but the muscles must first be there. We cannot create new ones. Surgeons can operate on our bodies to remove defects or correct faults, but they cannot create living tissue, and must resort to transplants from other human beings when such procedures may be necessary to preserve life. The mind is revealed to others in our actions, which are governed by it.

It is quite reasonable to conclude from all these observations that the natural world in which we live was thought out and brought into existence by a Being Whose power and intelligence immensely transcend our own. To assert that our law-governed universe came into existence by chance, that is, by evolutionary processes which are speculative, is illogical, unreasonable and contrary to human experience.

The Argument from Beauty

There is beauty everywhere in nature. All of us are well aware of such beauty as may be observed in the colourings of some butterflies and birds, the grace and co-ordination of flight, the great variety of bird songs, the varied array of scents and colours in flowers, the ever-changing lights and colours of sunsets and sunrises, the never-ending variety of landscapes, seascapes, mountains and lakes; and, when we look through a microscope, the endless variety of crystals and the cells of living things.

Darwin's explanation of sexual selection as far as beauty is concerned in plants and animals is quite inadequate. In the animal kingdom males and females are approximately equal in numbers, in spite of the beauty or otherwise of their features. Accepting the observation that beauty is in the mind of the beholder then it must be that there is something in the human mind that responds to beauty.

The only adequate explanation of this diversity and complexity with their overall harmony is an immeasurably superior being, a God, Who claims in His Word to have created all these things. Isaiah 45:8; *"Shower, O heavens from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may sprout forth, and let it cause righteousness to spring up also; I the Lord have created it."* (RSV).

Man's Sense of God

Anthropological research indicates that all peoples, tribes and nations had a belief in God, although usually accompanied by much superstition. There is also much evidence that primitive religion was everywhere monotheistic. The most probable explanation of this basis of a panoply of religions is that early man was given some revelation of the existence of God.

The recent appearance of agnosticism and atheism does not negate man's sense of God, but instead emphasizes the desire of some to deny it.

Humanity the world over has always had a sense of right and wrong. This faculty is called conscience. It may be uninstructed, perverted, or even ignored, but it is always present in some measure. This sense of right and wrong is not the same as self-interest. It often runs contrary to self-interest, and that implies that it is not innate, but that man has been invested with a conscience from a source outside his person and intellect. It follows then that conscience is God's warning beacon in the mind for moral and ethical behaviour. People have an intuitive sense that they will have to answer to Him.

Arguments of Philosophers for God's Existence

Philosophers have advanced alleged 'proofs' of or arguments for the existence of God. The German philosopher, Leibniz (1646-1716), stated these arguments better than they had been stated before, although many philosophers had tried to do so. Leibniz was one of the greatest intellects of all time. He brought into their final form the metaphysical arguments for God's existence. (Metaphysical means concerned with first principles.)

These arguments had a long history. They began with Plato and Aristotle, were formalised by the Scholastics in the twelfth century, and the ontological argument was invented and added by Saint Anselm, an Italian scholastic philosopher (1033-1109).

Leibniz's arguments for the existence of God are four in number:

1. The ontological argument (the argument that existence is a property and can be discovered);
2. The cosmological argument (the argument from the origin and structure of the universe);
3. The argument from eternal truths;
4. The argument from design.

These arguments will be considered separately.

1. The ontological argument depends upon the distinction between existence and essence. An ordinary person or thing exists on the one hand, and on the other has certain qualities which make up his, her or its 'essence'. 'Essence' consists of qualities such as 'melancholy', 'undecided', 'witty', 'domineering', 'close-grained', 'fibrous' and so on. Fictional characters in plays and novels have each a certain essence, but such characters do not exist as real people do. Real people each have an essence, but each is imperfect because of inherent sin. There must be an essence that is free from imperfection. Such an essence must belong to beings that are free from sin, for example Jesus Christ and the holy angels. The very apex of perfection must be God, so the perfect essence must belong to Him, Who possesses love, goodness and all the virtues in perfection. God, it is maintained, possesses all perfections, therefore He must exist. If He did not exist, there would not be the best possible Being.

2. The cosmological argument is a 'First Cause' argument. Everything finite, or real, has a cause, which in turn had a cause, and so on. This series of previous causes cannot be infinite. It is necessary that there must be a First Cause to begin the series, and this must be God. Leibniz further argued that it is necessary for everything to have a sufficient reason for its existence, therefore the universe as a whole must have a sufficient reason for its existence, and that sufficient reason is God.

3. The argument from eternal truths maintains that some statements are always true. An example is 'I think, therefore I exist'. The gist of this argument is that truths are part of the contents of minds, and that eternal truths must be part of the content of an eternal mind. Eternal truths must exist, and can only exist as thoughts in the mind of God.

4. The argument from design contends that things in the universe and in our world cannot reasonably be explained as the products or outcomes of blind, natural forces, but are more reasonably to be regarded as evidences of a beneficent purpose and a Designer vastly wiser and more powerful than we are. This Designer is God. Furthermore, with respect to thermodynamics and the definition of entropy, that is, the degree of disorder within a system, there must be an outside source of energy to maintain order within the system, and for the universe that source must be God.

Of the World Around Us.

Arguments from Our Own Observation and Knowledge

As was said at the outset, we cannot prove the existence of God. Belief in His existence is a matter of faith. But faith need not be blind, although it is defined in Hebrews 11:1 as the conviction of things not seen. Faith must be based upon reason. There are some very good and sound reasons on which to base our faith in the existence of God.

Cosmogony

Cosmogony is the theory or account of the beginning of the universe.

The solar system and the galaxies of stars are characterised by vast distances. It has been estimated that the nearest star is some forty million million kilometres (twenty-five million million miles) away from earth, and most of the stars are too remote for the distances to be dealt with except in terms of the extraordinary units known as light years.

Although the sun and stars are very far away, the elements of which they are composed appear to be the same as those on earth. Contemporary cosmological theories of the Big Bang, black holes, cosmic strings and dark matter are highly imaginative and depend upon the most tenuous, unsubstantiated evidence. At face value they appear to be absurd, and even after consideration they are fantastic in the extreme.

The observable universe of fiery suns and diverse planets seems to be the product of a vast designing and controlling power with a mind that has something in common with our own minds, though vastly superior to them. The Being who created and put in place the universe must be infinitely far-reaching in time and space, as well as in power and intelligence.

The Inorganic World

In contrast to the almost infinitely large, there is a world of the almost infinitely small. All matter is made of combinations of substances called elements, which cannot be separated into more than one pure substance. There are ninety-two naturally-occurring elements. Each element is composed of atoms that are exactly alike in their properties.

Atoms consist of protons, electrons and neutrons in particular numbers and combinations. Every atom is configured as a sphere with a central nucleus of protons and neutrons surrounded by a shell of electrons whirling in circular orbits around the nucleus. These invisible systems hold astonishing amounts of energy, as shown when it is released by atomic fission or atomic fusion.

All the atoms now known can be put in a series, and numbered 1,2,3 and so on, in such a way that the numbers represent the number of protons each atom contains, each proton with one positive charge being balanced by the same number of electrons, each with one negative charge. Hydrogen is number 1 because each atom of hydrogen has only one proton balanced with one electron; helium is number 2 with two protons and two electrons, lithium is number 3. Oxygen, so essential to human life, is number 8. This information was obtained by a combination of chemical experiments and mathematics. The late Sir James Jeans, an eminent astronomer said, "The universe appears to have been designed by a pure mathematician".

The properties of some of the inorganic chemical elements make possible another world, the world of living things, and from the harmony of those properties some elements appear to have been designed for such a purpose. Oxygen, for example, essential to all animal life, exists abundantly in a free state in the atmosphere, pervades the soil, and dissolves in water.

Another example is water itself. It is so unlike the gases oxygen and hydrogen of which it is composed, but is especially suitable for the essential part it plays in relation to life. It does not readily decompose, it dissolves many substances, and will conduct electricity only when salts are present in solution. The latter is important to the function of all living things.

Almost alone among the thousands of fluids known to us, water reaches its greatest density not at its freezing point, but at 4 degrees Celsius above it, with the result that ponds and rivers start freezing at the surface instead of at the bottom. This provides some degree of insulation at the top of the water, thus reducing the risk of the whole system becoming ice. If water obeyed the general law of substances, being most dense at their freezing points, it would start freezing from

the bottom, and freezing would be likely to continue to the top, and almost all creatures living in it would die. Also, the expansion of water on freezing has contributed to the breaking down of rocks, the carving out of cliffs and valleys, and the production of more soil.

Motion

The sun, the planets, the comets and the stars are all in motion. Atoms are in motion. It is one of the laws of mechanics that any body lying at rest will continue to lie at rest until acted upon by some external force. Just as it is necessary to define a First Cause of existence, it is necessary to postulate a First Cause of sufficient power to have set the universe in motion, but separate from it. That cause is the Being called God.

The World of Living Things

Life cannot arise spontaneously. Pasteur, the French biologist, showed that in a closed system, if all forms of life are killed off and fresh invasion prevented, new life does not appear in any form. The whole medical field of applied microbiology, sterilisation, the control of epidemics, and the safe performance of surgical operations, depend upon this fact.

Scientists have laboured to explain how life began, but have produced only a theory which on one hand contravenes some of the basic laws of matter, while on the other hand cannot be proven, and thus carries no credibility.

The problem of how life began is insoluble if we refuse to believe in a Creator. According to Genesis, the origin of life was a creative act of God. There is no other adequate explanation. Only the fact is given: no details of how it was accomplished are recorded.

Living animals and plants have appeared in the world in bewildering variety. The variety is so great that zoologists and botanists cannot hope to be familiar with all species. Each scientist specialises in some small group of animals or plants. Every animal and every plant is an inimitable entity of structure and function. Every animal and plant is observed to be appropriately fitted to its activities in its environment, and equipped for reproduction of its kind. These aspects are external, and not difficult to understand.

But what of the internal aspects of living things? Their physiology, biochemistry, pharmacology and genetics are not yet fully understood. It is now known how a muscle contracts, what the nature of nerve impulses passing through the brain is and how a fertilised cell grows into an accurate replica of its parents. Contemporary understanding of these subjects is based upon the function of DNA, found in the nucleus of the cell. The structure and function of this amazing molecule, different for each individual, must have been designed by a supreme Intelligence, because random events could not have produced such a result.

Materialistic science puts forward another explanation, the Theory of Evolution. What is popularly meant by this is based on Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection, which has two main propositions:

- (i) variations in individual species, resulting from the survival of the fittest individuals in a population;
- (ii) derivation by descent producing different descendants from a common ancestor.

Discussion of the Theory of Evolution must be left for another occasion. Two brief responses must suffice for now. Although survival of the fittest within species has been observed in many instances, the production of a new species has not been observed or accomplished. There is no evidence to show progressive development from simpler pre-existing species. The missing links are still missing.

The Testimony of the Bible

"Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created." (Revelation 4:11; (RSV).

The Holy Bible contains sixty-six books written over a period of about sixteen hundred years by at least forty-four authors. All the books are in harmony with one other with respect to the parts of history recorded in them, and that record itself is in harmony with contemporaneous archaeological discoveries. The Bible has been preserved through thousands of years, and in its writings many significant historical events have been foretold many years before they took place, the greatest of them being the advent of Jesus Christ. The Bible covers

the whole history of mankind, and indicates, frequently in symbolic language, the course of the future. No other recorded religion or philosophy does this.

The Bible is the only book given by inspiration of God. The case for belief in this inspired book is set out in the booklet 'Why Believe the Bible?'

The Testimony of Jesus Christ.

There are several historical accounts from the beginning of the Christian era that testify to the fact that the man Jesus Christ lived in the area of Palestine and carried out a brief ministry there. The Bible records much detail of the events and the purpose of that ministry. It shows that Jesus Christ is God's Son sent to reveal God to the human race and provide the means of reconciliation of mankind to God.

The reasons for belief in Jesus Christ are advanced in the booklet 'Why Believe in Jesus Christ?'

God in History

While the reality of the universe and the world of nature, of which we are a part, attest to the existence of a supreme Being, the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the truth of the Bible confirm God's existence. However, just to accept the existence of God does not fulfil our obligation to be intelligent with regard to this matter. The obligation must be extended to accept what God has inspired to be recorded in the Bible.

The fundamental message in the Holy Scriptures is that God is completely concerned with all mankind. To repudiate this concern can be regarded, in effect, as denying His existence.

The Biblical record shows that the human race became alienated from God due to the sin of Adam's disobedience. Human activity became so depraved that a flood to cleanse the earth was necessary (Genesis 6: 5 to 7; 11 to 13). Then came Abraham, the friend of God (James 2:23), isolated in Canaan, and given special revelations by God (Genesis chapters 13 to 15, inclusive). The promises to Abraham were confirmed with Isaac and then with Jacob, who was the progenitor of the nation of Israel, with Moses as their mediator, which people, to the exclusion of all other nations, were dealt with by God

(Amos 3:2) under the Law Covenant, for some fifteen centuries. The Old Testament prophets brought further enlightenment to some of God's people.

Finally, the Son of God was sent to redeem the human race from sin and death; to provide the ransom sacrifice, a perfect life paid for the perfect life that Adam lost. It was necessary also that His sinless blood was shed, *"for without shedding of blood is no remission"* (Hebrews 9:22) to ratify the New Covenant.

Since the beginning of the Christian era the gospel of that Covenant has been preached throughout the world. God is now dealing with people on an individual basis, and Jesus Christ is the Mediator between God and all people.

Conclusion

There are compelling reasons for believing that there is an immeasurably superior spirit Being with infinite intelligence and power behind the existence of the universe, our earth, and our place in the natural world.

It is impossible to discover from nature what God is like, apart from His having initiative, power and intelligence. In nature there are some very fearful and ugly things, and many people are unable to accept the existence of a God who appears to be doing nothing about them. There are tempests, volcanoes, earthquakes, floods and fires. Creatures prey on one another. There are parasites and disease germs; sometimes epidemics of them.

An enemy of God, Satan by name, a rebellious spirit being, has chosen to defy God, and has been permitted by God to pursue his evil course, and to Satan's influence and machinations must be attributed many if not all, of the fearful and ugly things we see happening around us.

"He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:44; RSV)

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm

in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." (1 Peter 5: 8,9; NIV).

God has revealed His essence, shown what He is like, and displayed His concern for mankind in Jesus Christ.

"Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no-one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him." (John 14: 6, 7; RSV).

In the Diaglott translation of Ephesians 3:11: *"According to a Plan of the Ages, which he formed for the Anointed Jesus our Lord"*, the Bible reveals that God has a plan that He is using through all the ages of history. He permits evil and suffering to continue while His purposes are being accomplished. He has not completed His intended purposes. He has promised a resurrection of all the dead, and a righteous world order in which all evil and suffering will be abolished for ever. In that world order or kingdom everyone will acknowledge who God is. The final act to overcome the influence of the enemy will be to abolish death: *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."* (1 Corinthians 15:26). Satan himself will also be destroyed (Revelation 20:10).

When all of God's plan and all His purposes have been completed by means of power delegated by God to Jesus Christ, then Christ will return all power to God, who will then be all and in all; or everything to everyone.

"For God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection under him," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him.

When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one." (1 Corinthians 15:27,28; RSV)

God is a spirit and seeks spiritual worship in truth from all His people: *"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4: 23, 24; RSV).*



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