

"Serious Conversations (part 7):"

Anonymous said...

Whether or not something exists does not depend on whether or not it can be described. If something exists, it exists independently of someone's ability to describe it. That is the nature of existence; that is, things exist whether or not someone knows it exists, let alone accurately describe its existence. Furthermore, something that exists is not limited in existence by the inability of someone to accurately describe its existence. For example, there are galaxies and phenomenon within galaxies that have not yet been discovered. But this does not mean that they do not exist since we cannot describe knowledgeable, sufficiently, or accurately. We know that things exist which are difficult to adequately describe. As far as God is concerned. God can be described, though not perfectly. He can be sufficiently described so that we can gain an understanding of His nature, greatness, and differences from ourselves. Though we will always fall short when trying to describe an infinite being, we can still say enough about Him to convey who and what He is so that the concept of God can be communicated. We can say that He is infinite, gracious, loving, all knowing, all-powerful, all present, holy, pure, righteous, that he is not flesh and bones, the only uncaused and infinitely eternal being in existence, etc. Though we may not be able to perfectly describe Him we can describe Him by listing His attributes and qualities. Attributes and qualities reflect the nature of the thing described.

Wesley

In fact, I think such belief would be an excellent intermediate step for believers. Believers in the from-nothing morality could indoctrinate their children with practical morality, instead of devout belief in man-made fairy tales about virgins giving birth to magical babies who can walk on water and duplicate bread/fish in Star Trek fashion. Furthermore, believers in the from-nothing morality would not waste time on man-made rituals, such as praising invisible men, pretending bread and wine are flesh and blood, sprinkling water on people, casting out invisible demons, etc.

Thank you for pointing this out. I will no doubt use the from-nothing morality in future conversations with believers. It won't turn a full-fledged believer into an atheist, but it might help those who are on the fence.

Anonymous said...

Wesley, allow me to make my points clear.

3. The moral law is an argument for the existence of a theistic God (after the Cosmological and Teleological Arguments).

It goes like this:

--Every law has a law giver.

--There is a Moral Law.

--Therefore, there is a Moral Law Giver.

If the first and second premises are true, then the conclusion necessarily follows. Of course, every law has a law giver. There can be no legislation unless there's a legislature. Moreover, if there are moral obligations, there must be someone to be obligated to.

4. The second half of my quote shouldn't have given you the impression that I incorrectly believe that such a morality would require more faith than Christianity. What I am saying is this...everyone knows there are absolute moral obligations. An absolute moral obligation is something that is binding on all people, at all times, in all places. And an absolute Moral Law implies an absolute Moral Law Giver. Now this does not mean that every moral issue has easily recognizable answers or that some people don't deny that absolute morality exists. There are difficult problems in morality, and people suppress and deny the Moral Law every day. It simply means that there are basic principles of right and wrong that everyone knows, whether they will admit them or not. Budziszewski calls this basic knowledge of right and wrong "what we can't not know," in his book by that title.

7. There is a case for the existence of God, Wesley, that has been well-documented and researched. Actually, there are several. The three most interesting arguments are utilized: 1- The Kalam Cosmological Argument (there must be a first cause of the universe); 2- The Teleological Argument (there must be an intelligent designer); and 3- The Moral Argument (because there are moral values and laws, there must be a lawgiver, God).

8. All worldviews require at least some faith, but Christianity, as the only one that accurately portrays reality, requires the least, because its claims can be shown to be objective fact. They are called "mysteries" in the Catholic church. Jesus Christ Himself was either a complete idiot who spewed lies everywhere he went, or He was the true Son of God. Why would He suffer a horrible death to lie to the world, Wesley? These are the only two options that we have about Jesus.

10. Not defending atheism, here, but...Wesley, have you read Bloom's book "Descartes' Baby"? I couldn't put it down when I purchased it...In this book and in many essays that he has written, Bloom argues that human beings are wired for a belief in God. Not that he believes in God himself, mind you. Bloom is a determined rationalist and self-declared atheist. Nevertheless, he finds the persistence of belief in God to be a conclusive proof for Darwin's theory of evolution. But, this is what drives so many evolutionary theorists crazy--the persistence of the belief that the cosmos can be explained only by a Creator. Bloom points to evidence indicating that the vast majority of Americans, including those with a college education, believe that God created human beings in their present form and largely reject Darwin's theory of evolution. Similarly, Bloom argues that human beings are also wired to be creationists. Bloom is a champion of evolutionary theory, but he is not willing to call creationists stupid. Bloom says that Richard Dawkins may well be right when he describes the theory of natural selection as one of our species' finest accomplishments. He states that it is an intellectually satisfying and empirically supported account of our own existence. But he says almost nobody believes it. Christians will look at this same evidence and draw the opposite conclusion--that the persistence of belief in the divine is evidence of the way our Creator has made us and a reminder of the imperative of evangelism--preaching the Gospel to those who are groping in ignorance and confusion. Oddly enough, God leaves evidences of himself in very strange places--even in essays written by atheists.

A few questions for you Wesley----

3. How does an atheist assign meaning to human activity? Is all meaning subjective, or do some activities have self-evident and objective worth and meaning. If so, what are these activities, and how do you arrive at their value?

5. What is the cure for man's suffering, especially his existential loneliness?

6. How does atheism view metaphysics? Is atheism purely materialistic and naturalistic?

7. Are humans of more intrinsic value than animals? Why or why not?

Wesley said...

7. The three "proofs" you cited have long ago been refuted by philosophers and theologians alike. Did you pick these three from a children's primer on philosophy? Why did you not cite some of the more modern (although still fallacious) "proofs" of God's existence? The cosmological argument is disproven by infinite regress and actual infinities, such as Zeno's paradoxes. The teleological argument is disproven by its fallacious assumption that complexity implies a creator (it does not, as there are many examples of complexity arising from randomness; e.g., diamonds or snowflakes). The argument from morality is disproven by the Euthyphro dilemma. That is, is an action good because God commanded it, or did God command it because it is good? If the first, then God's decisions are completely arbitrary and there is no absolute morality; if the second, then God dictates morality in accordance with universal morality (my from-nothing morality from the previous post and the exact sort of morality that theists claim does not exist).

8. When you say that either Jesus was a liar or he was the Son of God, you are executing the logical fallacy of a false dichotomy. There are far more options than this. The most glaringly obvious is that Jesus might not even have existed. Another possibility is that Jesus was incorrect or crazy; he thought he was the Son of God but actually was not. Another possibility is that Jesus never made any claim to being the Son of God and that such claims were edited into the Bible later by the Church to force Jesus into the mold of a savior mythos and maintain political power (this possibility is supported by the fact that the Codex Sinaiticus, the oldest copy of the Bible, does not include any mention of Christ's claim to divinity).

5. What existential loneliness? I don't feel this loneliness, so I can't really say what the cure for it is. As for man's suffering, there is certainly some of that. But the solutions, just like many of the problems, are to be found in mankind's ingenuity. I hope that the pursuit of science, education, the construction of infrastructure, and many other human factors will one day solve our problems. Sorry I can't give a quick and wrong answer to all the world's woes like "Don't worry! God will save us!"

6. Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that I admire. Atheism is not materialistic, though there are definitely individual atheists who are materialists. Atheism is, by definition, naturalistic (in opposition to supernatural).

7. Humans are animals, and do not have any more or less intrinsic value (since nothing has intrinsic value). However, in the value system which I choose to live by (which is not intrinsic to the nature of the universe), a human life is more valuable than an animal life.

Anonymous said...

My points to Wesley:

2. As for your request that I cite some more modern proofs of the existence of God, here you are. The cosmological argument argues that there was a "first cause", or "prime mover" who is identified as God. It starts with a claim about the world, like its containing entities that are caused to exist by other entities.

The teleological argument argues that the universe's order and complexity are best explained by reference to a creator god. It starts with a rather more complicated claim about the world, that it exhibits order and design.

The ontological argument is based on arguments about a "being greater than which cannot be conceived". It starts simply with a concept of God. Anselm of Canterbury and Alvin Plantinga formulate this argument to show that if it is logically possible for God (a necessary being) to exist, then God exists. I have actually read some of their work, Wesley, and it is worth the read. The mind-body problem argument suggests that the relation of consciousness to materiality is best understood in terms of the existence of God. I enjoy reading about the the will to believe doctrine, and it was pragmatist philosopher William James' attempt to prove God by showing that the adoption of theism as a hypothesis "works" in a believer's life. This doctrine depended heavily on James' pragmatic theory of truth where beliefs are proven by how they work when adopted rather than by proofs before they are believed (a form of the hypothetico-deductive method).

3. I believe St. Thomas Aquinas did this work here. Many other Christian denominations share the view that God's existence can be demonstrated without recourse to claims of revelation. Several authors have offered psychological or sociological explanations for belief in the existence of God. William James emphasized the inner religious struggle between melancholy and happiness, and pointed to trance as a cognitive mechanism. Sigmund Freud stressed fear and pain, the need for a powerful parent to care for us, the obsessional nature of ritual, and the hypnotic state a community can induce.

4. Since you seem to be such an expert on the existence of Jesus, let's look into this...the historicity of Jesus is accepted by almost all biblical scholars and classical historians. We can now know that He was real, and most researchers agree he was, so don't give me that crap that He wasn't. Where is your research coming from that He didn't even exist? James Dunn, a leading scientist, describes the mythical Jesus theory as a "thoroughly dead thesis". Many other leading

renowned scientists concur. So now I can ask you how do you explain the historical records of the miracles of Jesus? Do you know they did not occur? Contemporary liberal Christians may prefer to read Jesus's miracles as metaphorical narratives for understanding the power of God. The early 20th-century liberal theologian Edward Scribner Ames asserted that "if religion is to be vital and satisfying in this new age, it must also deal with facts of actual experience, discarding superstitions, miracles and magic." Not all theologians with liberal inclinations reject the possibility of miracles however, Wesley, and this is my main point. But they may reject the polemicism that denial or affirmation entails.

5. What I took from this book is that Bloom sets out to provide this explanation--He considers and then dismisses the functionalist theories offered by sociologists in recent times, focusing instead on an understanding based in evolutionary science. In essence, Bloom argues that belief in God is itself an accident of evolution. What he calls "the religion-as-accident theory" asserts that belief in God is a function of the fact that human beings are wired to believe in a distinction between the physical and the psychological. Bloom argues that the move to believe in the survival of a soul after death--an afterlife--seems both short and natural. Similarly, Bloom argues that human beings are also wired to be creationists. In my take from this book, Bloom says that Richard Dawkins may well be right when he describes the theory of natural selection as one of our species' finest accomplishments; "it is an intellectually satisfying and empirically supported account of our own existence," Bloom compares evolutionary theory to quantum physics, arguing that such ideas will never feel right to any of us on the earth. As he explains: "When we see a complex structure, we see it as the product of beliefs and goals and desires. Our social mode of understanding leaves it difficult to make sense of it any other way. Our gut feeling is that a design requires a designer--a fact that is understandably exploited by those who argue against Darwin."

6. Wesley, how can every atheist be infinitesimally agnostic? All meaning is subjective? How? So you say every person has the freedom to live by the values that he or she chooses. If you chose long ago a path of love, teaching, and service to humanity, and you are atheist, what is the point in giving back, if you have no soul? I still have never understood this with you, and you certainly haven't explained in detail... What are your rewards? Do you want rewards for your good actions? Do you believe in rewards for good actions? Do you believe in eternal rewards? Well, I assume not, if you do not believe in an eternity after death.

8. I do not agree with your point that human life is of more value than animal life. Why would it be if there is no afterlife? If there are no souls, and there is no afterlife, then aren't we all the same? You said so in the first part, but then you contradicted yourself in the finale of the statement. Boy, you are confusing the hell out of me this evening.

Wesley said...

2. These are classic arguments for God, and they are taught to everyone in Philosophy 101 right along with **the fact that they contain glaring logical fallacies and are consequently invalid.**

The cosmological argument is disproven by infinite regress and actual infinities, such as Zeno's paradoxes.

The teleological argument is disproven by its fallacious assumption that complexity implies a creator (it does not, as there are many examples of complexity arising from randomness; e.g., diamonds or snowflakes).

The argument from morality is disproven by the Euthyphro dilemma.

The ontological argument is disproven best in Kant's "Critique of pure reason." The proof takes too long to explain, so I will not reproduce it here. Instead, I go with the **rejection of St. Thomas Aquinas** (whom you apparently esteem, since you have cited him several times). Aquinas rejected the ontological argument (many Catholic theologians follow suit) on the basis of it committing a **bare assertion fallacy**. In addition to these logical objections, there is a trivial example of the incorrectness of the ontological argument in the form of Guanilo's island.

4. First let me say that I do not subscribe to the belief that Jesus was not a real person. I believe there actually was a Hebrew philosopher during this time period that fit the description and on whom the Jesus-as-savior myth is based. I only presented this idea to show that you were executing the logical fallacy of a **false dichotomy**.

Having said that, there is no physical evidence to support the existence of Jesus. There are no works of carpentry, self-written manuscripts, artifacts, etc. All claims about Jesus derive from the writings of other people. There is not a single contemporary writing that mentions Jesus (all documents about Jesus were writing after his alleged life). The earliest accounts of Jesus's life are the Epistles of Paul and the gospels. These were written between 60 A.D. and 90 A.D. This means that some 30 years passed between the alleged crucifixion of Jesus and a single writing that mentions him.

Furthermore, most biblical scholars believe that *none of these early writings were actually written by people who had ever seen Jesus in person*. The Epistles of Paul are the first writing to mention Jesus, and they make it abundantly clear that Paul never actually saw Jesus (at least not while he was alive - Paul claims to have had a vision of resurrected Jesus). The gospel of Mark is the next written account of Jesus and the first gospel (chronologically, not in the Bible). From it's own words, it is clear that Mark had neither heard Jesus nor served as his personal follower. Mark is merely an account of the popular Jesus story at the time. Similarly, all of the information on Jesus in Matthew comes from Mark. Luke admits that he is an interpreter of earlier material and not an eyewitness (Luke 1:1-4). The last gospel, John, was written far too late for the writer to be a first-hand witness. Some also say that John 21:23 contains reference to the death of John Zebedee (the actual apostle of Jesus). Add to this the fact that in order for any of the writers of these gospels or epistles to be first-hand accounts of the life of Jesus, the writers would have needed to be 70-90 years old. This seems preposterous given that the average lifespan of that day

was 30 years.

So, to recap: no physical evidence, no writings mention him during his lifetime, and the earliest writings that do mention him are all based on hearsay.

As for miracles, reason dictates that until more evidence is given, we must dismiss them as fairy tales. Ask yourself this question: Which is more likely? Is it more likely that a supernatural force actually bent the laws of the universe to impress a moral code upon some goatherders that only applies to society on a single planet among the trillions? Or is it more likely that the accounts are false, either because the original witnesses were mistaken or tricked (because of their limited understanding of the physical world) or because the text was mistranslated or deliberately falsified at some point in the innumerable recopyings?

5. Your second summary of Bloom's book was closer to the original content in many ways, but you still try to weasel out of your mistake by quoting Bloom out of context. What Bloom is saying in his book is that while intellectually we know that evolution is correct and that supernatural gods are not real, we are biologically compelled to believe in creationism (due to superstition being a valuable evolutionary trait for so much of our existence).

6. I have explained in detail many many times my basis for morality and my motivation for kindness. My reward for living what I consider to be a good life is the personal satisfaction of doing so and the love and respect of the friends I gain from it.

8. What don't you understand? We are all the same. Humans are animals and do not have any more or less intrinsic value than any other animals (since none of us have intrinsic value). In the value system I choose to live by (love, teaching, service to humanity), humans are more valuable. They have a greater capacity to improve the quality of life of others than animals.

Anonymous said...

Wesley, you bring up some interesting points in your latest post. Please allow me to respond to them...

2. Zeno's paradoxes have been counter-disproven as well. And through logic, the teleological argument cannot be simply disproven through fallacious assumption. The entire Summa (Thomas Aquinas) provides simple and direct illuminations into the nature of God: It can be proved in five ways that God exists. The basic format of the arguments in the Summa begin with a few brief postulates about the nature of God followed by a series of reasonable objections to those assertions. A flaw in the logic of the objections is raised and the objections are systematically answered by logical counter-arguments, bringing the argument to a conclusion supporting the original postulates. Anselm's proof bypasses Hume's Fork. And Kant just seems to take the argument in different tangents, and it does not convince me. It actually confuses me.

4. Occasionally, non-historians deny the historicity of Jesus (Having to do with the question of

whether Jesus was in fact a real person who had a real life on earth), but few scholars take this seriously. Tacitus, a Roman historian, wrote about Jesus in A.D. 115, and Josephus, a Jewish historian who did not believe in Jesus' divinity, wrote about him. Dr. Gary Habermas wrote an extensive analysis of the historicity of Jesus in his work *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*, which discusses many historical sources that mention Jesus.

At the time of the crucifixion, the disciples were confused, disorganized, fearful, doubting, and burdened with mourning-not mentally motivated or equipped to engineer such a wild hoax. Hence, to explain the empty tomb and resurrection appearances by a conspiracy theory seems out of the question.

5. Have you read any Paul Copan? Very interesting author...He poses some interesting stuff that I want to ask you, Wesley...If everything that is has its origins in singularity, what brought about the singularity? If nothing can come from nothing, how come the Universe? It is fairly clear that if it is to have an explanation, it must lie outside itself (metaphysically, not spatio temporally outside). How can that be? Copan has explored not only the traditional understanding, but also various alternatives that have been proposed (steady-state, multiverses, vacuum fluctuation, inflationary and oscillating models, quantum gravity, etc.), showing that these are all unsatisfactory for various reasons.

6. I somewhat understand your reasoning on loneliness now as well as animals and humans. Although I do not at all understand your view on how we do not have any intrinsic value as human beings. And I don't understand how you can believe that one is more valuable than the other if we are all the same. It's as if you are contradicting everything you say. What is your definition of intrinsic value?

8. Why does every civilization believe in a Creator?

11. How did 35-40 men, spanning 1,500 years and living on three separate continents, ever manage to author one unified message, i.e. the Bible?

Absolute truth implies that truth cannot be subject to one's own mind, but is rather established by an absolute and common Creator, therefore proving God's existence. If there is no absolute truth, it cannot be absolutely held true that God does not exist. No faith in God is the most blind faith of all, because it assumes that no faith can be placed in God without any verifying evidence that faith in God fails, and with proof that faith in God is remarkably solid. Atheism is more of a fanciful desire rather than a sincere belief. It undermines our value system and our Creator's authority.

4. By definition, evil is the transgression of God's Law. There is no evil that atheists can truthfully cite that is not a breach of God's Law. Without God's Law, evil wouldn't be defined

and wouldn't exist. In the animal world, evil doesn't exist, because animals are not under a moral law. Humans are, and atheists verify that humans are by acknowledging evil. Evil then is proof of a Creator who subjected creatures under a law, which if it is broken, sin is bred. Evil is proof of God's existence. The fact that evil can be universally defined shows that there is a common Creator of humans; otherwise, the definition of evil would not exist or would so widely vary that no consensus would exist to make it meaningful in any tangible sense. Atheists have therefore accidentally yielded a proof of God's existence, by acknowledging the universality of evil.

5. Agnostics assume the position that the existence of God cannot be known for sure. Agnostics would be better off to say that their contemporary knowledge falls short of verifying the truth of God's existence, but that future analysis and further knowledge may later prove God's existence to them.

1. Agnostics are "atheists" when it comes to most religions. No agnostic is going to proclaim that he "does not and cannot know" that the flying spacecrafts exist, or that the Greek gods exist, or that Thor exists.

2. But then we ask more sensitive questions, like "does the Christian God exist"? In these cases, the agnostic is quick to back off and play dumb: "Oh, but how could I know such a thing? I am subject to epistemological limitations. That question is beyond me." The only difference between the distant question about flying spacecrafts and the close question about the Christian God is that the God has received more historical air time. We have heard more about the Christian God, and he is far more entrenched in our culture.

3. So, why does the agnostic give special credit to the Christian God? Why does the agnostic feel that it's quite all right to play dumb in this case but not in the other cases? The answer is relatively simple. The agnostic must believe that he has evidence for the existence of the Christian God that prevents her from outright dismissing Him. (Actually, that's the best case scenario from an intellectual perspective. The worst case scenario is that the agnostic is afraid to admit that He does, in fact, dismiss God all together.)

4. If agnostics want to play dumb they have to explain why playing dumb makes sense in certain cases but not others.

5. "Lazy" might even be the key word. The main argument I have heard that is pro-agnostic is that "Church wastes time" - agnosticism is basically saying, "Whatever, I won't worry about it", which I see as lazy, as I see pretty much all non-committal as lazy - for example, people who do not have a favorite color, I see as too lazy to make a choice. Now replace "color" with, "interpretation of the laws of the universe". You make a decision, then you gain a plethora of research regarding your stance, and you boldly proclaim your view...

9. Have you ever read about Occam's razor--which is actually a good argument for the existence

of God. Contrary to the statements above, the universe cannot replace God as explanation for its own existence. The universe is finite in both size and time. The universe had a beginning in finite time at the moment of the Big Bang. How did this universe decide to create itself? How did the universe design itself with physical laws and parameters exactly fine tuned to support life? The laws of physics are designed with such precision that it is almost inconceivable that they could be the result of chance. For example, take the ratio of the number of electrons to protons. This ratio must be exactly equal to one to better than one part in 10 to the 37th power. Other constants of physics, such as the expansion rate of the universe, are fine-tuned even more delicately, as small as one part in 1055. Random chance does not design such a well-crafted universe. All the atheistic explanations for such an exquisitely defined universe require the presence of trillions of other universes, of which ours is the one which happened, by chance, to have the exact physics required for the formation of galaxies, stars and planets. Therefore the atheistic explanation actually goes against Occam's razor since it requires some mechanism by which universes can sprout from some super universe and randomly change their laws of physics. If one were to calculate the number of universes required, by chance, to have the exact physics required for the formation of galaxies, stars and planets, it would exceed 10^{10000} . The mechanism by which physical laws could randomly evolve would add further complexity. Design by an intelligent designer is obviously a much simpler explanation.

In summary, mbat, "Most theists agree that God has a nature. Then we must raise the question, who created God's nature? If we just accept that God has a nature and exists without a cause, why not say that the known world just is and that the laws of physics are what they are, without a cause?"

God is uncreated, therefore His nature is just as eternal as He is. Although it is possible the universe and the physical laws could exist without a cause, 1 in 10^{10000} is not exactly what one would call good betting odds.

FOR REFLECTION, MBat:

Many atheists tend to stereotype Christians as stupid, uneducated people. However, I personally know dozens of scientists who are Christians, and not only believe in God, but can rationally present evidence for His existence. Christianity specifically calls people to use their brains. As Robert Griffiths (Heinemann prize in mathematical physics) stated once:

"If we need an atheist for a debate, I go to the philosophy department. The physics department isn't much use." (I have this bumper sticker on my wall at work)...

It is the atheist who now denies the implications of modern cosmology and physics because they imply the existence of a Creator. Those who believe the Big Bang correctly describes the origin of the universe, must admit that the universe had a beginning in finite time and space. Did it just pop into existence on its own? Did it just happen to have exactly the right physical laws and constants required for life? It is the atheist who must believe in miracles to explain our existence. Therefore, John Gribbin, an atheist physicist has stated:

"The biggest problem with the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe is philosophical - perhaps even theological - what was there before the bang?"

Serious Conversations (part 6)...

Wesley said...

Another frequent misunderstanding in your posts is that there is no morality without belief in a higher power. This belief has been studied from philosophical, social, psychological, and biological angles and has been found to be incorrect in all cases. Let me enlighten you.

Philosophical

The arguments from this angle are too numerous to enumerate and I cannot expect you to gain a background in philosophy overnight. But if you have some free time, I point you in the direction of Plato, Locke, Kant, Hobbes, and Nietzsche. Arguments for morality without god from philosophy are so well-established, in fact, that they are covered in almost all theological seminaries.

Social

The most atheist countries in the world are Sweden, Denmark, and Norway (each with >70% of the population being Atheist). The percentage of the population of these countries that are in prison are, respectively, 0.075%, 0.070%, and 0.065%. The three most Christian countries in the world are the United States, Brazil, and Mexico. The percentage of population of these countries that are in prison are, respectively, 0.714%, 0.183%, and 0.182%. Apparently, being a so-called "Christian nation" gives us 10x more people in prison as compared to an "Atheist nation." Furthermore, atheists/agnostics are vastly under-represented in prisons worldwide, with some studies putting the percentage of atheists in world prisons as low as 0.05% (they comprise 10%-20% of the population). If atheists/agnostics are so amoral, why aren't more of them in prison?

Psychological

Jean Piaget conducted experiments with children playing the game of marbles. His experiments show that even before children learn religion, they understand fairness and want to be accepted by their peers. In short, before children know about belief in a higher power, they will play by the rules of marbles and show remorse if they cheat. Kohlberg's stages of moral development reinforce this idea. Another conclusion of Kohlberg's work is that even in the absence of fairness-reinforcement from peers, children can learn morality from stories. While this might come in the form of Bible stories, it could just as easily be Aesop's fables or fairy tales.

Biological

Altruism and morality are valuable evolutionary behaviors that have, due to their value, been propagated among all higher lifeforms (including humans). The mechanism of this propagation is that humans and animals are more likely to sacrifice for another when that other is of similar genetic makeup (a child, sibling, or parent). Consequently, even if a child dies while saving its brothers and sisters, the moral tendency is passed on. Furthermore, one who has served others and lived is more likely to receive aid when in need (and more likely to live and pass on its

genes). Examples of morality in animals are common. Vampire bats, who must drink blood every night to survive, will feed their peers who did not find prey and are in danger of starving. Primates understand fairness - the entire group will refuse to cooperate when different members are given unequal rewards for the same task. In the insect world it's even more common, with entire castes of ants, bees, and termites gladly fighting to the death to preserve the workers, queen, and eggs. None of these animals believe in a higher power, yet they show moral behavior.

Anonymous said...

Secularists start with a basic commitment to a naturalistic universe. Humans are thus an evolved species who must find some way to organize themselves into meaningful units, limit their behavior, direct their energies, and pass the world on to the next generation. Marriage and the family unit were developed by human social evolution over time, and are therefore negotiable. Morality is a product of human experience, and will thus change over time. Human beings are autonomous individuals who have a right to define themselves and determine their own destiny. Limitations on individual freedom must be very few, and authorities are necessary evils that must always be questioned. Christians, on the other hand, are committed to a supernatural worldview, which starts with the purposeful creation of the universe by God. Human beings are a special creation of God, made in His own image, and are granted important privileges, responsibilities, and gifts which are to be used to God's glory. Morality is determined by the divine Lawgiver, who has addressed His human creatures with His Word and command. God created institutions such as marriage for example for our good, and the institutions are not negotiable or to be subjected to human social engineering. Human beings are granted rare freedoms by God, but among these is no freedom to determine our own destiny or existence. We are limited in the exercise of our freedoms by God's intention and command. God, the ultimate authority, has also instituted human authorities for our common good. Morality is not merely a human product, but the revelation of God. Truth never changes, and morality is not relative. Morality is not correlated with the non-believer.

For example, astronomical observations indicate that the universe has not always existed but came into being apparently out of nothing. These observations match the teachings of the Bible that also indicate that God created the universe out of nothing.

These are some additional points I would like you to think about:

1. Belief in something does not make it real. Certainly people can believe something without any rational reason and even contrary to evidence, but I have never heard of anyone believing anything without any reason at all. For you to state that belief can use physical evidence and logic to support it is good.

4. If you say there isn't any evidence for God then you are claiming to know that in all places and time there is no evidence for God. That is hardly a logical position to hold.

If you say that there isn't sufficient evidence for God then I might pursue some of the evidence you've rejected to see why you have rejected it. Is it possible that your lack of objectivity is clouding your ability to rightly analyze evidential arguments?

5. So far, Mr. Wesley, you have only attempted to demonstrate that mere belief is not sufficient evidence to prove God exists and that the evidence for God is "sorely lacking." you have not offered anything that substantiates the validity of atheism. To demonstrate that atheism is true, I propose that you would need to either:

--Provide a logical proof why God does not exist, or

--Disprove, within reason, all theistic evidences for God that are presented to you.

Since you are trying to disprove evidence for God, I ask you what would constitute sufficient evidence for God's existence?

1. So Wesley, you don't see any convincing evidence for the existence of God. That does not mean there is no God.

Since you cannot know all evidence, it is possible that evidence exists that proves God's existence, or at least supports His existence. Therefore, it is possible that God exists. If it is possible, then faith has its place. Wesley, if it is possible that God exists, then you should be an agnostic (an agnostic holds that God may exist but no proof can be had for His existence.)

3. If God exists, the laws of logic would be a product of his nature since he is absolute, transcendent, and truth (logical absolutes are conceptual, absolute, and transcendent which reflect a logical, absolute, and transcendent mind). He did not create the laws of logic, Wesley!!! We simply recognize them because God exists. Therefore, God cannot violate those laws because He would violate His own nature -- which He cannot do.

Wesley said...

1. You say that "if it is possible that God exists, then [I] should be an agnostic." This is a very common criticism - the response is this: every atheist is *infinitesimally* agnostic. It is possible that your omnipotent and omniscient God exists, but it is *infinitesimally* possible. Rather, it is infinitely unlikely. For instance, it is possible that tomorrow gravity will completely stop working. If someone asked you to prove that gravity would not stop working tomorrow, you could not do it. It is possible that we will wake up tomorrow and find that the Earth has spun off at a tangent and we're all floating up to the ceilings of our houses. But if you ask most intelligent people if they believe that will happen, they will tell you that they do not believe it will happen (and this disbelief is reasonable). The point is this: there is some point at which an unlikelihood becomes an impossibility. If you are familiar with the mathematical concept of a limit from calculus (which you should be, if the background you provided is true), then you should understand this.

2. You ask what type of evidence I would require to believe in God. The truth is, it would take a tremendous mountain of evidence. The reason is this: the God of your beliefs is more complex than any physical law in the universe (or any we could imagine). Any evidence you could provide could almost certainly be explained by far more likely theories which do not involve the personification of some supernatural being with intentions. For instance, if one day (let's say

March 31st) every atheist in some city (for your sake, Huntsville) were to burst into flames, that would not be sufficient proof of your God. There are any number of far more likely explanations (one of which would be that this was a well-orchestrated attack on atheists), but in the broadest sense: it is more likely that there is a fundamental law of the universe (like gravity) that on March 31st, 2009 all atheists in that particular region of space burst into flames.

This *Theory of Universal Atheist Combustion on March 31st in Huntsville on Planet Earth*, however unlikely it is, it is more likely than the existence of the God of your beliefs. Why? Because it is an infinitely simpler explanation than one that involves an omnipotent being that simultaneously monitors and controls every atom in the universe and gets enraged when gay people get married. The proposal of this omnipotent God theory is a SEVERE over-reaction. It's as if Rutherford, when conducting the gold-foil experiment, had jumped to the conclusion that there was some invisible man inside the plum-pudding atom who intercepted alpha particles and fired them back at the originator.

I think that your position is that you will continue to believe in God no matter how much evidence against him you are given. Please answer the following hypothetical question: If I were to give you indisputable evidence that God does not exist, would you accept it and renounce your belief in God? I do not have such evidence, but if the answer to that question is "No," then it is *you* who has already made up his mind and is unaccepting of other explanations.

Your assertion that "[science can't explain] the beauty of a sunset or the love of a man or a woman," makes no sense. Science *can* explain these things. There is nothing divine about either beauty or love. Beauty is a learned social construct (which originates from tribal values concerning the selection of sexual partners, food, or prey). If you don't believe me that beauty is a social construct, take the example (which you provided) of a sunset. While we might think a red sunset was beautiful, in some African societies it is a bad omen and not at all associated with beauty. Other examples of society determining the perception of beauty are women binding their feet to keep them small in some Asian cultures, women stretching their necks with metal bands in some African tribes, and the considered beauty of pale-skinned people in Europe in Elizabethan times (whereas now westerners mostly prefer their partners to be tan).

Love is also a social construct, though it is more heavily influenced by biology. It was an evolutionary advantage to have two parents to look after a child (as is the case with a monogamous couple). Many animals are also monogamous (parrots, beavers, otters, jackals, foxes, some bats, etc.) - further proof that love has biological roots and does not require belief in God.

5. DING DING DING!!! There it is! You say "the atheist has made a mistake of not recognizing that knowing the existence of a being who exists beyond space and time is not the same thing as knowing numbers that you can write on a piece of paper." This is the one I always love to hear, because it means that the theist is giving up. You're realizing you can't win an argument based on reason, so now you're falling back to,

"Well, I know God doesn't make sense, but that's because God doesn't have to make sense. He's beyond our understanding, so he's immune to reason - he doesn't have to follow the laws of the universe as we know them." My answer to this is that if there were a God who made himself logically impossible to us, I'm sure he won't be surprised when people do not believe he exists.

8. You say "If God does exist, [I am] in trouble." Again, you're getting confused and repeating yourself. I have already responded to this (pathetic) argument, but I respond again here. Your concept of belief through threat of punishment is very interesting. Why do you not convert to Islam? Their version of hell, Jahannam, is arguably worse than the Christian hell (If Muhammad was a prophet, you are in trouble, Anonymous). Why do you not convert to Norse mythology? The Viking version of hell, Niflheim, also seems on par or worse than the Christian hell (If Odin is real, you are in trouble, Anonymous).

Anonymous said...

Wesley, my points to you from the previous post:

3. To respond to your question--"Please answer the following hypothetical question: If I were to give you indisputable evidence that God does not exist, would you accept it and renounce your belief in God?" My answer is no. I believe God exists because the Holy Spirit lives through me (something you cannot fathom). I know He is real. I do not require evidence to prove He is real in my life. But see, you atheists can't understand this. The reason you can't understand this is because you've never had a conversion experience. And guess what, you never will because you have decided to reject the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and for this, we Christians believe you will spend eternity separated from love and peace and from a God who loves you.

5. God did not make himself logically impossible to us. In fact, He made it very clear for us. But your works will not advance you even slightly. Even if you could do far better than you are doing now, you still can't do well enough, because you don't please God by being good (Gal. 2:21), but by accepting Jesus Christ through faith (John 1:12). Sincerity is not the way to heaven. What if you are sincerely wrong? (Remember John 14:6 says salvation is through Jesus, not sincerity.) If you are relying on your sincerity, then you are saying because you are sincere, you are therefore good enough, on your own, to be with God.

A few more points for you to think about Wesley:

1. The Big Bang, for example is essentially the claim that the universe came into existence spontaneously in the distant past. I assume that you acknowledge the Big Bang. If I am wrong, please let me know, Wesley. Nevertheless, how would you explain the cause of this sudden initial "bang"? You cannot and no one can. Does any scientist know the physical properties of existence before the universe began? No. Can something bring itself into existence if it does not already exist? No. The universe began and it had a cause. How did it begin and why? No explanations can be offered with any evidence to explain the conditions before the Big Bang. Yet, people, scientists and atheists included, merely accept that an unknown, unexplainable cause brought the

universe into existence.

2. And, Wesley, you tell me you aren't required to give me proof? YES, you are required to interpret any evidence in harmony with your naturalist, non-God system of thought. for the sake of argument, if we were to assume the Big Bang theory, why isn't it an evidence for supernatural intervention since it is an unexplainable event that defies known naturalistic principles?

Wesley said...

4. I never said that love was a doctrine of atheism. I said that love was easily explained by biological and evolutionary factors (which it is, and which you don't seem to deny). I also implied in my last post that love and kindness are a part of my personal values - they are. If you doubt this, please refer to the posts of my friends which describe me as loving and kind - they know me much better than you and are in a better position to judge this.

7. In your point #7, you also attempt to say that because some parts about the Bible are good ("truth, love, honesty, giving, etc."), then the whole thing (And the miracles of Jesus) must be true. This is obviously incorrect. Adding in some good parts does not make the entire text true.

Regarding the Big Bang:

1-2. There is a difference in admitting that we currently have no explanation for pre-Big-Bang conditions (which is what I and majority of the scientific community do) and *positively asserting* that the Big Bang was caused by an invisible man, One of these methods admits ignorance - the other tries to fill ignorance with imagination and baseless assertion.

Wesley's Quick Case for Atheism

1. The burden of proof is on the theist.
To quote Bertrand Russell:

"If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes. But if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is an intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense."

The point is that the burden of proof for outrageous and unnecessary ideas lies with the believer. Also, to extend the analogy, imagine that I began scheduling weekly services to worship my celestial teapot. Further imagine that I began to start wars, bomb abortion clinics, burn scientists, hunt witches, and sacrifice humans all in the name of my teapot. Don't you think that these acts merit a little bit of evidence?

2. We are all already atheists for a great number of religions. If you claim that the burden of proof is on the atheist, then to justify your beliefs you must disprove all other religions which are in opposition to yours.

If you claim that the burden of proof is on the atheist (an atheist is what you are from the point of view of other religions), then you must provide this proof against other religions (since many other religions believe things that are logically opposite to Christianity - such as multiple gods, reincarnation, etc.).

An equivalent argument is as follows: I (hypothetically) believe that there is a Magical Invisible Pink Unicorn (MIPU) that grants me wishes after I die. The MIPU is the only god - there are no others, and the MIPU does not go by any other names. If you maintain that the burden of proof is on the atheist (that's you, in this case), then *please disprove the MIPU*.

3. At this point in the argument, if you cannot provide definitive proof of your God (or, alternatively, argue that the burden of proof is on the atheist and disprove all religions in opposition to Christianity, including the MIPU), then reason dictates that you should be an atheist.

Anonymous said...

Ted, why could a loving God send someone to eternal punishment?

Ted said...

The answer: He wouldn't.

That's not the point. Is that what you've been taught? That God *sends* people to hell? In the traditional sense, I've been taught that people send themselves to hell. That sin is a wall that we build between ourselves and God, not the other way around.

Personally, I do not believe in hell. The closest reasonable analogue I can come up with is simple separation from God, caused by the wall that is built by sin. Considering that the goal is union with God in the afterlife, separation from God is likely to be the worst punishment. That said, I have a hard time believing even that, considering the infinite forgiveness that would have to be possessed by a being of pure love.

Okay, that's done. Now to your question of "have you reached Wesley yet through your kind and loving tactics?" The answer is that I am not TRYING to reach Wesley. I don't try to reach anyone. I try to live my life as well as I can, and all I can hope for is that God speaks to others through me. I make myself available to listen and, if necessary, to talk. If my experience can be of help to others, I'm willing to share it. Otherwise I just live my life.

Anonymous said...

Wesley, I'll summarize my points to you this evening:

3. Logical absolutes exist. They are, by nature, conceptual absolutes. Conceptual absolutes exist in the mind. They do not reside in matter. These logical absolutes cannot be quantified or tested in a lab. Yet, they exist, Wesley. In fact, scientists USE these logical absolutes as a basis for verifying their science. The problem for the atheist is accounting for their existence. Since the logical absolutes are conceptual, they transcend all people at all time and are absolute in all circumstances... since they are absolute. Conceptual absolutes cannot be accounted for in an atheistic worldview. But they can be accounted for in a theistic one. Jesus Christ with an absolute mind, has conceived of the logical absolutes. They are a reflection of His mind. At least I can offer an explanation for their existence where the atheist cannot. If there are not logical absolutes, then you have no logical basis for your statements about whether or not Jesus existed. It would then be purely subjective and meaningless to believe Jesus did not perform miracles. Show me your evidence that this never happened; All your evidence is based on mere probability, deeming it invalid! Finally, it would be basically illogical to state that miracles cannot occur. This is because in order to logically state that miracles cannot occur, a person must either know all things in the universe so that he can rightfully state miracles cannot occur, or he must have some logical proof why miracles cannot occur, or possess a sufficiently sophisticated knowledgebase to conclude the miraculous cannot occur, etc. Furthermore, it is not enough to state that there is no evidence for the miraculous since a person's experiential base is limited. It may very well be that miracles have occurred and this person is simply not aware of it.

3. Fulfillment of prophecy can have different explanations. Some state that the New Testament was written and altered to make it look like Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy (but there is no evidence of that). Of course, it is possible that God inspired the writers and Jesus, who is God in flesh, fulfilled these prophecies as a further demonstration of the validity of Christianity.

4. Wesley, either Jesus is true and all other religions are false or other religions are true and Jesus is false. There are no other options. I choose to follow the risen Lord Jesus myself...

Now for you Ted, with whom I'm becoming very confused at the moment. You stated in one of your previous posts that you don't believe in hell and why could a loving God send people there? Well, I have your answer...

--The idea of a loving God sending people to hell for eternity is not easy to accept. Why would God, who is full of mercy and grace, send people to a place of torment for ever and ever for not trusting in Jesus even though they are nice people, or never heard of Jesus, or were sincerely trying to find God? Is that fair? Is that right?

--When people ask these questions, they are appealing to what they perceive as fairness. They are looking at the issue from their human perspective, and this is not the correct way to address the issue, Ted.

--The Bible tells us that God is love. "And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him," (1 John 4:16). God cares about us and seeks our well being and security. His thoughts about us are infinite and His love is too. This is why God does not desire that anyone go to hell, but that all come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

--The Bible tells us that God is righteous. "God is a righteous judge," (Psalm 7:9). His righteousness is part of His character just as are mercy and love. Righteousness deals with justice and justice deals with the Law. This means that God will always do that which is right and He does so according to the righteous Law that He has set forth. God cannot do anything wrong. God must do that which is right, otherwise He would not be righteous.

--Because God is infinite, when we sin, we are offending an infinite God. This is incredibly significant. The reason sin is so bad is not so much because of the one committing the sin, but because of the One who is offended. In other words, sin is so incredibly bad because it takes on a horrible quality by the very fact of who it is against: an infinitely pure, holy, and righteous God.

--And the finale of this, Ted, Jesus spoke of Hell in the gospels. If you are a Christian as you have claimed to be, don't you believe what Jesus said in the Gospels about Hell? Actually, Christ Himself reference Hell more than He did Heaven in the Gospels. Finally, for those who still maintain that we can please God by our efforts, we must ask how many good works must he perform in order to undo an offense against an infinitely holy God? Is there a standard by which we can judge which sin requires how many goods works to cancel out? There is none. Therefore, he is left in a predicament. Since God must punish the sinner for offending Him (breaking His holy and righteous law), and our works cannot undo the offense against God, then how are we going to escape so great a righteous judgment?

4. The word Hell in the Christian Scriptures appears frequently in:

Mark (3 references)

Matthew (12 references)

Luke (3 references)

Acts (2 references)

Revelation (4 references)

Jesus Himself spoke of a literal Hell in these scriptures:

1. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

2. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:40-4)

Mbat said:

Also, I am curious as well as to what you mean by the "time, space, and feelings don't really matter" comment.

My comment:

It would be interesting to get a demographic on atheists and what their true feelings are, but I dare to suggest that most atheists are feeling comfortable with the idea of material life being sufficient as the means to achieving all their innermost needs and desires, feeling no need for anything deeper than the basic human functions and goals - work, sex, money, lifestyle, power, peer recognition, etc. Driven by this energy to extract from the material life what they feel will give them the most satisfaction, they likely wouldn't feel any need (or have the time) to explore any possible spiritual side to their existence. This is why time, space, or feelings would seem to have no place in their lives. How many comfortable atheists have felt the need, for example, to learn about the glories of God and testimonies from believers. If they have no soul, then what's the use in having ANY feelings at all. There would be no point. Because feelings really wouldn't matter, now would they? That's just one example. There's a lot out there to explore in the way of the supernatural. But atheists just don't manage to find the time....until something happens in their lives, or until their list of things they thought would provide genuine lasting satisfaction gets shorter and shorter as they get older and wiser. But if an atheist were to be diagnosed with terminal cancer, then this would be the time to watch him or her. They would be forced to think about a greater spiritual purpose in my opinion. But now, as long as they are without problems or plaguing events in their lives, why bother?

Wesley, I also have some questions for you to respond to if you have the time...I'm still very confused regarding some of your postings...

Questions for Wesley...

1. Is there life after death? And if you conclude that there is not, how can you vehemently deny it?
2. Why is there evil and suffering in the world, and are evil people ever punished for their acts (on this earth or beyond)?
3. Do you believe in any demonic forces? How do you explain the Catholic rite of exorcism through an atheistic viewpoint?
4. When were the gospels written and by whom? And if you will, explain the minds of the disciples from the viewpoint of an atheist.

Ted said...

2. That is a ridiculous analogy. The Catholic Church does not require its members to adhere

completely to all of its tenets. This is why people who don't pray the Rosary are not ostracized by the Church.

5. I understand your reasoning fully, and it's wrong. Interpersonal relationships are not (this is a fact) dependent upon belief in the supernatural. Monkeys have relationships. Monkeys have feelings. Animals don't believe in Jesus, so why do they have feelings?

My argument is this: Since animals have feelings (observe a dog when his owner comes home sometime), and humans are animals, humans have feelings. Therefore Wesley has feelings, whether he believes in a god or not. Your arguments suggest that an apology is required only when the person has feelings, therefore Wesley requires an apology.

6.3. What is the relationship between faith and works? **James 2:14-26**

6.4. Explain your version of a "separation from God" as you suggested in an earlier post. Step by step now...If God is all that is good, and being in God's presence is the ultimate goal, then separation from God is the ultimate punishment. Is that so hard for you to understand?

6.5. What are demons? A human construct used as an excuse for evil in this world.

Anonymous said...

Ted, I'll respond to your comments now.

1. Misquoting Jesus was one of the most misleading texts a Christian can read. Bart Erhman claims that the New Testament has been altered by scribes and religious leaders to reflect their own brand of religious belief. However, in Misquoting Jesus, it simply shows, that he grossly exaggerates New Testament textual differences and fails to cite textual critics who disagree with his undocumented claims about possible changes. Contrary to Erhman's assertions, it is clear that the New Testament canon was already accepted by the Church by the early second century, and textual comparison shows that no major doctrinal statements were changed or added after that time.

2. If you take sacraments in the Catholic Church, then you have agreed to follow the rules and tenets of the Catholic Church; therefore, if you are not subscribing to the rules of the Catholic Church, you should NOT be Catholic. What don't you get about this? Why don't you join your own brand of religion church; perhaps scientology or something else? I'm really beginning to believe you are agnostic, Ted. I've argued with your type many, many, many times before, and the result usually comes out agnostic every time.

6. Demons-- Since Jesus also talked about demonic possession and demons in the New Testament, you still maintain that they are humanly constructed? By definition, no one knows what lies outside his/her tiny circle of knowledge.

"This I Believe (part 4)"

Wesley said...

you no longer believe in what Dawkin's calls a "personal god." That is, a god that interferes in the physical world for your sake.

Partly because you don't believe in a personal god, you also do not believe in Catholicism or any other of the world's major monotheistic religions. In additional support to this, you recognize the fact that 70%-90% of religious adults believe in the religion of their parents. You know that although you have a strong devotion to your Catholic beliefs, you would have an equally strong devotion to a Muslim morality if you had been raised in Pakistan or Indonesia. You have recognized that the main method of perpetuation of religion is through childhood indoctrination. You know that if no more children were raised religious and religious membership depended solely on adult conversions at a rate proportional to their number of members and similar to historic rates, in 2 generations religious people would make up < 1% of the population.

Since you do not believe in a personal god, you also understand that all of the moral codes espoused by various religions were created by men and not some omniscient god. You recognize that nobody in this universe knows any more about any afterlife than you.

I view religion as a dangerous and destructive force. Most people would list the following examples: the crusades, the inquisition, witch trials, sectarian violence, burning of churches, bombings of abortion clinics, etc. I, however, shy away from these examples, because there has been plenty of non-religious violence (though there would obviously be a lot less total violence without religion). I think the real danger of religion is the mindset it inspires: namely, that it's ok to ignore reason and logic. This is why there are people that, in the name of religions, continue to believe many things which disagree with overwhelming evidence.

Religion claims the truth of ideas that cannot currently be proven (the immortality of the soul, heaven, hell, the protocols that must be followed to enter these supposed places, etc.). Religion does not require evidence of the (mostly outrageous!) claims it makes; science does. By its very nature, religion is opposed to science.

Religion imposes restrictions on the lives of its followers that are not required by science or morality. These are doctrines invented by men who were, by today's standards, woefully unaware of the laws of nature and their place in the universe. The idea that these ceremonies and concepts (which were dreamed up by men centuries dead) will provide us any benefit in this life or any possible afterlife is entirely fiction (or at best, a random coincidence that seems astronomically unlikely considering the specificity of the ceremonies and the number of possible permutations). The restrictions of religion are unnecessary and not required.

mbat said...

Here's how I deal with both reason and faith. I think you'll get much farther with both faith and reason than with just faith. (Not saying anything about how far you will get with just reason. That's not something I'm sure of yet.) If you blindly accepted everything in the bible without reasoning some of it out, we'd all still have nine wives and would still stone adulterers etc. Faith is a lot about accepting what cannot be proven, but it is also about getting as far as you can with reason first before you start accepting things. If you reason as much as you can first, there's a smaller chance you'll be accepting things on faith that are wrong. However, at some point in religious belief, reason will not help you anymore. I admit that; by definition that's what faith is about, accepting some things without logical proof. I'm not there yet, so that's why I'm reasoning.

Wesley said...

Faith is defined as belief in the truth of something without logical reason or physical evidence. Where did you learn that it was a good thing to accept something as truth under these circumstances?

The method you're espousing for minimizing the possibility of "accepting things on faith that are wrong" is as follows:

1. Figure out as much as you can with reason.
2. Begin believing things for which you have no evidence (or even evidence of likelihood) and call it "faith."

The method I espouse is:

1. Figure out as much as you can with reason.
2. Leave everything else as an open question to be investigated with reason as evidence becomes available.
3. Do not try to explain away mysteries with fairy tales or by erroneously accepting facts for which you have no basis.

It is almost infinitely improbable that God exists. It would require mountains of evidence to even begin to point to the existence of an omniscience omnipotent God that simultaneous monitors and controls every atom in the universe. Even if you found some such evidence, it would almost certainly be explained by a simpler solution in the form of some theory of natural law (such as universal gravitation) which doesn't involve such an infinitely complex super-being with intent.

Lastly - even if the miracles did occur exactly as they are depicted in the Bible and even if we had video footage shot from 4 different angles of each event, belief in God STILL isn't warranted. There is no need to invent an omnipotent and omniscient being to explain away all our mysteries. The proposal of this theory is a SEVERE over-reaction. It's as if Rutherford, when conducting the gold-foil experiment, had jumped to the conclusion that there was some invisible man inside the plum-pudding atom who intercepted alpha particles and fired them back at the originator.

ADVICE: You are wasting your time trying to mesh reason with "faith." The two are

fundamentally at odds - one says you need evidence to believe something, the other says you do not. Instead, ask yourself if you want to remain religious. If the answer is yes, then accept that you are being unreasonable. If you continue attempting to apply reason to your faith and you're capable enough to do it correctly, you will reach the inevitable conclusion that God almost certainly does not exist.

"Was the Bible written by men alone?" The answer is... YES!!! The "evidence" you give for the Bible being God's word is that the various books "all perfectly harmonize in meaning and Biblical prophecy." You don't even seem to know anything about the false religion to which you ascribe. (Wesley sites several examples of Biblical contradictions.)