

Does God Exist?

Challenging the Arguments FOR Atheism

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I've written on this before as one will find in my Autobiography. So, some things might be redundant with at least, hopefully, some newer insights thrown in. So, this is not intended to replace my other writings on the topic but to supplement them. Therefore, this is not at all considered a full treatise on the subject and readers should consider reading my other essays and writings on religion in order to get a more complete picture of my message.

This is inspired by a lecture at Oxford offered to explain how it is that God does NOT exist. Note that I do not subscribe to the conclusions expressed in the lecture but, nevertheless, I really liked the lecture and am referencing it below. Dr. Michael Shermer ([link](#)) does an excellent job of explaining the reasoning behind atheism and how it is that God is a product of human nature and human society over time throughout history.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pOI2YvVuuE>

He uses all the right words and explains well the concepts involved. It is very educational. But, there is still a problem with that reasoning and there is still reason to believe in a God, a supreme being. This essay will offer 3 areas of concern or problems with the "no God" argument.

The 1st Problem

If the link above is no longer available, Dr. Shermer correctly and convincingly argues that it is in the nature of what it is to be human to invent the notion of God. He effectively points out how a realistic view of history and human nature strongly supports the idea that "God" is a human-originated social construct. Everything he offers from the thinking and motivations of early man to the psychological predisposition to presume the presence of a higher authority are sound and convincing points. But, in spite of this, it is not the end of the speculation.

For me, while I may agree with the psychological predisposition described and accept that so much of our religious world is originated from man rather than of truly divine origin, I personally have no problem with the notion that God can exist anyway. Consider that there is a large brown paper bag sitting on the table. It is closed and one cannot see inside nor touch it or investigate it in any tactile or direct manner. Then everyone sits around and offers guesses as to what is in the bag. As expected, few sit idle and ignore the bag as virtually everyone has some sort of opinion. Some are outlandish and unsupported. Others are reasoned and offer some sort of logic or rational explanation. But, through all of this, no one can look into the bag.

At some point after this has been going on for some time, a couple of folks step off to the side and start discussing what some of the observers are saying. They note how reasonable some were and how crazy others were. They provide their own meta-critique on the observations being made by everyone else. This is not elitist nor worthless and is, in itself, a useful although indirect approach

to better understanding the nature of the bag's contents. It is important as yet a further removed observer can consider both the direct arguments as well as the meta-critique in developing a more reliable perspective.

So, this first-order problem is that one cannot prove that it is impossible for the bag to contain walnuts. One can suggest that it may be unlikely. One might reason even correctly that it is natural for people to assume that it contains walnuts. One might explain how it is not even at the end of the walnut harvest season so everyone's assumptions are just wishful thinking. After all of the arguments and explanations are finished. The bag, in spite of everything, can still contain walnuts. We look at it. We see it there on the table. The contents remain in question and worthy of debate. But, there is one undisputable fact: there is an "inside" to the bag. Only the nature of that inside is in question.

Sure, some argue that it is empty and that the bulges we see along the outer skin are just a natural shape of the bag. But, there is no reasoning at all as to why the bag would have that particular shape. Some arguments just don't go very far and seem weak. Others argue that there could be popcorn in the bag.

I'm not attempting here to suggest any analogy between bag contents and the nature of God or a divinity. I'm not suggesting here anything about how the nature of popcorn or walnuts somehow compares to the nature of God or a supreme being. Far from it. I am merely pointing out how it is natural for people, not being able to look into the bag directly, to suggest different explanations and reach different levels of confidence about their theories.

Those who offer popcorn as a notion have their own reasoning about how much more common it is and how the table is obviously naturally adorned with the more popular snack. Critics challenge that the bulges in the bag's skin would be smaller and that popcorn would more likely stain the porous material of the bag's skin leaving stains that might be observed. In other words, every perspective can be challenged and, most often, people fail to fully consider the limitations or failings of their own perspectives. On and on it goes.

Nevertheless, the bag is still there and the contents remain elusive from direct proof. One can argue effectively that the bag does or does not contain walnuts. But, regardless of the arguments, short of conclusive empirical proof, the bag can and might indeed still contain walnuts! Most believers of there being a God engage in the most unfortunate characterization and elaboration on the accompanying spiritual world thereby building a perspective with more and more parapets that are vulnerable to destruction and counter-argument. These notions, speculations and superstitions do their case no good at all. In fact, they are particularly susceptible to the sort of challenges offered by Dr. Shermer, referenced above. One must not forget that, in spite of all speculation that the bag does not, would not, cannot contain walnuts, it can still contain walnuts.

The 2nd Problem is in the Nature of God.

Where do people get their notions of God? Organized religion with preachers on Sunday and on radio and television broadcasts are busy arguing relationships between every aspect of daily life that are directly choreographed by the active hand of God. If you move to Cincinnati then God

brought you there (when that perspective serves their purpose) or you rebelled from God in your move to Cincinnati and need to listen to His directives more closely (when that serves their purpose). If you start offering a service to the community (a sideline business) then God has told you and directed you to His service, unless, of course, the issues are about distraction from family and other responsibilities in which case you are ignoring the message from God about where you should direct your efforts in His interest. This, along with how it is that God needs money (the George Carlin perspective), goes on everyday all day long. The TV preacher will tell you clearly that God needs \$100. They tell you further that, if your faith is not so strong, if your faith is weak (you clearly aren't worthy), then you could give less money consistent with your insufficient faith. Wow. That's a tough sell.

Consider the lack of reason and illogic offered daily or hourly from organized religion. "All things are possible with God." This is a popular notion that is, of course, not true at all. I cannot become an Aardvark "with God." This is an impossibility and God has nothing to do with it. Whatever the nature of God, he is bound by the logic that is the law of the universe where meaningfulness is maintained. I guess He could create a different universe bound by different laws and restrictions if He so chose, but short of such an extreme intervention, we are currently bound by the laws and restrictions, or limitations, that govern and provide meaningfulness in this particular universe.

For example, in a base-10 counting system, if that meaningfulness is maintained, the quantity of 2.0 added to the value of 3.0 cannot equal the quantity of 7.3. It will always be equal to a 5.0 so long as the ordinal counting numbers maintain their meaningfulness. God cannot change this. It makes no difference if He created the system or not. The phrase that "All things are possible with God" is exchanged among parishioners in a fantasy that could not be more false. For example, strong faith will not empower me to run faster than Carl Lewis, the Olympic star. It is beyond my potential. That is, it is beyond my reality and not at all possible. This is a fact and it makes no difference how omnipotent God is.

Organized religion never seems to recognize how it is that God may actually be indifferent. This notion does not sell. No one in their congregation or extended constituency is compelled by an indifferent God. What if God has no preference in whether you move to Cincinnati or Denver? What if God has no concern one way or the other whether you choose to start a sideline business selling paintings out of your home, or not? Organized religion fails and thereby misleads the people massively on this level. For those who reason, for those who think critically, these perspectives erode the fabric of faith quickly and effectively leaving people with no spiritual foundation at all. Some are led to Atheism and religion offers nothing in response but an ever strong appeal to faith in spite of knowing that faith, regardless of its dimensions, potency or endurance, will never empower me to out-run Carl Lewis.

Parents

A lot of folks get their spiritual insights from their parents either directly or indirectly. That influence, while probably more impactful in days past than in modern society, cannot be overlooked. Today, virtually all aspects of raising a child are influenced by the outside world as the homes of our parents and grandparents were more cloistered than today. Children are exposed to much more outside the control and influence of parents than ever before. Nevertheless, it seems likely that this influence may not foster a stronger faith and allegiance to spiritual mandates than

the contrary. Parental standards and norms are often viewed with a critical eye and can sometimes be discarded as quaint or obsolete especially by a rebellious youth.

My grandparents, as an example, confused social norms with pious and proper spiritual behavior. That is, what was actually a social convention they tended to view as part of God's plan and a directive for human interaction. One does not mow the grass on Sunday; it's just not done. That was their perspective and it clearly had a religious element to it. One could not reasonably or respectfully challenge their perspectives and their reasoning, or lack of it, without insulting them. They were to be left with their faith and their perspectives without any outside challenge from the younger generation.

Movies

I found great value in the religious movies of the great Hollywood era. Richard Burton, Robert Taylor, Victor Mature, and of course Charlton Heston in Cecil B. DeMille movies and others, along with many more from modern cinema epics, all brought to life the characters and stories of the bible. It was an important and effective part of my education not at all to be undervalued or dismissed. But, with that said, there is no reason at all to think that Moses held up both arms in order to execute the parting of the Red Sea. Movies depict a fantasy and there is no way to know how far they depart from reality, even in the historical record, let alone in an authentic spiritual characterization.

It seems natural to look at any scene from any such movie and judge it silly or child-like even if the overall subject is serious. This can easily pull one away from rather than reinforcing a sense of spiritual identity especially for a generation already less inclined to accept movies as depictions of reality. It seems that movies, in their contrivance and almost propagandized role, actually reinforce Dr. Shermer's account of God being invented through human nature and social constructs.

So, it is easy and, one might argue, natural or even inevitable to reject perspectives of God provided by organized religion, preachers, movies and even parents. From a cultural perspective, this doesn't leave much. It seems natural that many are lead to doubt or even atheism. But, it seems to me that thinking alone can yield an acceptable notion of and reliance on God's existence without suspending reason. In spite of how this sounds, this does not involve some transcendental meditation or any imagined spiritual connection.

The 3rd Problem is What is Knowable

The 3rd -level problem is that the arguments offered by challengers like Dr. Shermer can be completely accepted and still not provide a definitive proof (could still be walnuts in the bag anyway). Organized religion fails yet again as it points out how faith is the believing in the absence of proof, regardless of the lack of proof, that proof is unnecessary and faith can still be achieved. This, while simultaneously offering testimonial after testimonial in an effort to convince and even coerce the skeptic as if such claims and unsubstantiated declarations are, themselves, proofs. This obvious and drastic yet constant contradiction is perhaps religion's greatest failure. With faith you don't have or need proof... yet, our testimonials are proof. The catch-22 is intense.

Attending a Sunday church service will likely focus on a limited set of common themes. The morality of caring for one's fellow man, the improvement of one's character and virtue by following religious teachings and more. This often extends to the development of one's status as a good and chaste person ever-improving in the "flock" under God's care. There are of course elaborate and extensive unanswered questions and assumptions that permeate these notions which are never answered or even addressed. Religion is good at avoiding unanswered questions.

One wide-spread and common theme is the saving of one's soul. That is, the achievement of an after-life existence in, with or as a part of God's world of goodness. While this latter theme, the *evangelical*, is considered by many to be the most important, it is often considered a mere binary condition: saved / not saved. The church does little to address what happens after that goal is achieved. I.e., what is the real purpose of religion once a person is saved? They almost seem to ignore what happens after graduation in their blind and one-dimensional focus on getting the diploma. Nevertheless, all of this requires a considerable belief system and, for the agnostic or atheist, offers little or nothing in response as a confirmation, an answer or agenda for life.

Two of the most puzzling themes extremely common in these settings that present considerable difficulty for the non-believers are, 1. the all-powerful nature of God, and, 2. the establishment or strengthening of a system of belief, or faith through reliance on the Bible.

The first seems to me to be utterly ridiculous as a theme or even as a topic of discussion. Yet, a great deal of material among preachers and churches is devoted to making this point. It takes on various styles or areas of emphasis. For example, "God is great" is a common mantra. I do not take this to mean that God is terrific, wonderful or marvelous but rather that God is immense, grand, or omniscient. Ambiguity is a considerable limitation in religion and the lack of technical meaning undermines the message for serious-minded, thinking people again contributing to the rise of Atheism.

Also, there is an emphasis on all that God is capable of. I mean, they spend a great deal of time explaining and attempting to convince the parishioner how all things are possible by God. This is an interesting point. The God that is THE God, the God that created the universe, the stars, the galaxies, the big bang, the microbes, atoms and molecules, the God that created love, desire, ambition, logic and rational thought, along with time and all that will ever exist, ever, is able to hear and answer your prayer. They want to emphasize how God can help you with your broken leg or your questionable employment situation or your goals for greater prosperity. They emphasize that He can (a silly point, it seems), but rarely address whether He will.

Ironically, religion (and those people that embody and make up organized religion) ignore in their willful blindness an inherent catch-22 in their message. An omnipresent theme is how God is "trying" to achieve this or that. I have even heard of the army of the righteous doing battle on behalf of this or that mission of good. The necessary element in such notions is effort: goal-oriented trials and tribulations in the pursuit of an eventual outcome that, until achieved, remains elusive and not yet realized. To paraphrase, God is trying. He is attempting. He is engaged in a struggle. That is, He's doing the best he can. And, oh yes, God is all-powerful and all things are possible with God, without reservation. The obvious contradiction cannot be ignored and is not at all lost on those who are left to be non-believers. Still, the message persists that God can do it.

Again, I point out how it is a ridiculous, unnecessary and redundant point. To say that God is God already accounts for the whole package. I mean, God being omniscient and omnipotent already accounts fully for all such notions. He can do this or do that. He shall achieve this, accomplish that, invoke this or that outcome. He is God. Once said, everything else can only detract from the point, not add to it. Yet, religion persists in emphasizing the obvious and reiterating that which is already accepted to those who already believe. But, these contradictions for the atheist only reinforce the disbelief.

The second, strengthening faith through reliance on the Bible, is extremely common yet completely ineffective as a recruitment strategy. That is, for the disbeliever, that mindset of doubt and rejection includes both the spiritual as well as the book which reports that spiritual foundation. Much of this is delivered through an accounting of historical events. The Bible, being the primary if not the only source, accounts for many miracles and other elements that are used to convince one of the supreme powerful nature of God. It seems there are millions of stories, to exaggerate my point, from Moses parting the Red Sea to the Hebrews lost in the desert for 40 years to turning water into wine and even to the "virgin" birth of Jesus. Additionally, preachers by the thousands daily, if not hourly, account what God's purpose is, what God wants for us, what God's doing second-by-second in coordinating our unfolding future and they rely directly and specifically on passages from the Bible as "proof."

The Big Six

This is a good place to bring in a slight digression. There are many religions in the world and one may argue about the flaws, limitations and misdirection of any of them. But, as a child of western culture, I know more about the protestant religions and Catholicism than Taoism or Buddhism, etc. I have determined that there are six principles in the faiths in the western religions that seem fundamental to all of them. Most interestingly, I believe them all to be completely and utterly false. They are sorts of truisms in these religions yet are falsehoods. They simply are not reality as I perceive it even though all six are common to all protestant religions and readily accepted by millions without question. Consider these six commonly accepted notions:

1. God is busy and actively working in our lives directing its progress.

Not true. I see no evidence of and no reason to believe in the daily manipulation of God's intervening hand in the unfolding of our daily lives. It is not whether God is capable of bringing you to Cincinnati but rather whether he would. The people you then encounter and those you leave along with the remaining history of the universe are forever altered by such a thing. This is more profound than people seem to understand. The ripple effect of one simple modification, like my stopping for a red light, are virtually infinite as my timing is delayed which changes where I will be at every moment as will my relationship to all other things in my path. The ripple effect is that once my relationship with the next vehicle is changed, their position in the universe is also changed affecting their impact on their future, etc. etc. Maybe I fail to crash into an obstacle ahead that I would otherwise have encountered. Maybe I do crash into someone who now finds themselves at the right place at the right time for such a mishap where they would not otherwise have encountered me. Their lives are then changed like mine which then changes others and still others, more and more without end reaching to infinity. How much more profound with thousands or millions of modifications all embedded in a seemingly simple notion of moving to

Cincinnati - or even interjecting a momentary pause to drink from a fountain. Such a spiritual intervention amounts to nothing less than a reinvention of the universe. To place us all into the role of mere puppets acting and reacting to the chaos of endless unfolding interventions and manipulations at God's hand throughout every second of every day seems absurd and not at all the reality of our world.

2. We, as humans, can detect and determine this divine intervention and manipulation to be true and how it manifests itself.

Not true, even though countless people believe they know it happens. Even if God were to somehow intervene in the unfolding history of mankind and redirect a so-called "timeline" to an alternative reality wherein you end up living in Cincinnati, you probably would think that you went there purposely of your own accord. That is, you wouldn't somehow go unconscious and suddenly wake up there wondering what supernatural force had intervened. You would think you willfully and manually directed your car to the airport through the traffic safely on your own and avoided crashing into the abutment with your own hands on the steering wheel in your own sense of safety. Maybe your company transferred your employment location or your spouse got a new job there or that's where the school was located that you intend to attend. Short of a telegram from God or a miracle voice in the night, there would be no way to conclusively determine a divine intervention distinguished from all other rational possibilities.

3. There is a mandate to cooperate with God's daily on-going efforts and direction.

Not true. Absent any consideration of good and bad or right and wrong (one ought to do right and ought not to do wrong), there really is nothing to suggest that one must modify one's own plans, actions and intentions to comply with a divine commandment on the specifics of our unfolding lives. In fact, one might argue that the Bible provides 10 commandments and none of them address whether I move to Cincinnati versus Hoboken. How is it that this is somehow not my own choice? There is nothing to suggest that God cares one way or the other. In fact, it seems inherent in the Bible that many lessons therein are provided to help one become a better person with a better sense of good and bad, right and wrong such that we can make better decisions and make better choices - ON OUR OWN. It seems this is the very purpose of such lessons - that we learn to act with some autonomy and even that we have personal and intrinsic responsibilities to do so. In other words, the lesson (even the Biblical lesson) seems to be not a matter of compliance or cooperative response but instead that we are to intend good. We are to intend to do good. But, it is OUR intention, OUR choice that is our responsibility rather than a matter of blind and ignorant compliance.

4. Cooperation and compliance yields improved life conditions.

Not true. The logic here is not so much that following God's plan will fail to provide any benefit but rather that one cannot identify a divine intervention and determine its exact intent in order to reliably conclude what compliance is required. Too, even if one could know, it may be that what we perceive as improved life conditions may not at all match God's plan. Organized religion and, in particular, those who patronize that institution, expend a great deal of energy (and television on-air time) accounting how their faith has provided for them many successes, prosperity, happiness and more. In spite of the testimonials, there is no proof of any kind in any way that establishes any correlation between faith and prosperity. That is, the faithful can be rich and healthy or poor and sickly. So too the non-believers. Not even Karma in Hinduism and

Buddhism can account for improved life conditions as these testimonials attempt to show. Good people of great faith have hardships and evil people often find undeserved rewards and benefits. Yet another catch-22 is how religion, in spite of suggesting how faith yields prosperity and benefit, acknowledges that true justice and genuine rectitude is only available in the next life with God.

5. How to cooperate - specifically what to do - can be determined from the Biblical text.

Not true. Biblical accounts can easily be twisted and used to support just about anything. There can be contradictory accounts both drawn from the Bible. Even when it comes to the 10 commandments, as clear and precise as they are, it leaves impossible difficulties in making righteous decisions. It really isn't very easy to resolve conflicts like whether to starve vs. steal a piece of bread with good intentions of later restitution. Or perhaps whether to steal milk for a starving baby. Or, killing an assassin to prevent another innocent from being killed is a classic conflict not easily resolved. The biblical text has been studied by tens of thousands of mankind's best scholars for many hundreds of years. It is probably not an exaggeration to suggest that it is the most studied of all texts and with a presumption of the greatest possible importance for mankind. Yet, the result is anything but a clear and concise directive for exactly what to do or what not to do. The result of this is more chaotic and provides less clarity than the studies of virtue in ancient Greek philosophy.

6. The preacher/minister is empowered (because of extensive study and/or Divine inspiration) to interpret and deliver God's biblical message.

Not true. There are preachers and then there are preachers. They don't even agree with each other let alone provide any sort of consistent or reliable truth. Minister, preacher, reverend, cleric, vicar, rector, parson, nun, father, priest – all names that invoke a serious sense of authority, knowledge and supremacy. For thousands of years, the religious leader was also the social leader, the one in control, in most cases, even above their political/governmental counterpart. Was the Pope executing God's directive in convicting Galileo? Should I have donated to minister Robert Tilton, a televangelist, for his fraudulent family crisis center that was never built? Should I have been a follower of Jim and Tammy Bakker and their *PTL Club* and devoted my tithing to their cause? Not colleges of divinity nor years of practice nor specially choreographed dynamic personalities have shown any reliability or consistency in their interpretations of Biblical text let alone the prescriptions that follow. All of this does hint at the self-affirming nature of organized religion and screams of its own missing objectivity. The obvious and inescapable awareness that the preacher/minister is just a person like any other - hopefully, a well-meaning person - who is employed in a job or involved in a business earning a salary and performing a task contributes greatly to the separation of the nonbeliever. For the atheist, they see no reason to be a follower of the minister or a believer in their message than they do their plumber who may be replete with notions and opinions.

So, these six notions, commonly accepted and widespread as they are, are not at all true in my way of thinking. I suspect that a review of atheists would place these six ideas at the forefront of their disbelief. Religion does a defensible job of outlining what is good and what is bad, more or less. That is, there are many accounts in the Old Testament that one might question as conflicting with the *Turn-The-Other-Cheek* directive. But, still, religion presents what is good. It is in the "Good" business. Whether presented as a cliché or platitude or, instead, a genuine plan for righteousness, most religious experiences provide a reasonable prescription. But, religion does a very poor job of

explaining "the Why" - the real nature of The Good and how exactly it is, indeed, The Good. I.e., what makes it so? Short of compliance with God's plan or attempting to be more "God-like," what is it in the nature of goodness itself that makes it so? One might better turn to Plato's *Protagoras* or *Gorgias* to better understand the underlying nature of Virtue and Happiness. Religion does a very poor job of addressing this compared to many philosophical endeavors and, for thinking, rational people, this is a considerable failing. I suggest that it can lead some to atheism as a consequence of rejecting religion.

To Believe or Not to Believe, That is The Question

So, what are we left with? There seems to me little surprise in the growth of an atheist or agnostic. Given the above critique it seems more reasonable to ask why there wouldn't be such non-believers. In other words, given all of the flawed characterizations it might seem reasonable to reject them all. Indeed, the argument from Dr. Shermer is just that - an accounting of how it is in man's nature to invent - on our own - all that we have seen in the accounting of God's existence.

It seems that one is forced to choose, literally, between the atheism of Dr. Shermer or the movie theatrics of Cecil B. DeMille or worse, the silly contradictions and obvious contrivance of televangelists. Either God is a manipulative puppet-master working in mysterious ways in need of money or He doesn't exist at all. Either God is struggling with difficulty in his hourly efforts to achieve that which mankind continually undermines, especially with financial contributions diminishing, leaving God's efforts confounded to some degree, or the alternative notion that He actually doesn't exist. It seems that people must choose between the secular argument and the inherent nature of man versus an endless array of unbelievable and fantastical contradictions impossible to resolve. It is no wonder that so many choose the former.

In my mind, the real problem is that the brown paper bag continues to exist. Even with all pessimism and the critique above, it remains there on the table beckoning the curious to guess what resides inside. It could of course be nothing but that seems like an odd notion given that there is indeed a bag. Of course, either nothing in our mind has meaning or we can at least accept our senses that we do really see a bag and the bulges that are part of its character. With no insult to René Descartes, I am confident that more exists than just me thinking. There are photons, atoms, molecules and more. We look upward into the cosmos and find more than an illusion, a fantasy or slight-of-hand misdirection. We do have a reality and we are part of a real existence all around us. Let us consider that the bag is not empty.

It may be that there are many convincing arguments as to how the bag does not or maybe cannot contain walnuts. Yet, the bag may actually contain walnuts anyway as the bag's contents cares little for such speculations. We can listen to those that account their stories, their Biblical stories, their testimonials, their arguments as to how compelling their stories are to convince us to believe. But, what if those fantastic stories, those miraculous and hard to believe stories, aren't actually true?

That is, Moses parts the Red Sea... but what if he didn't? Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead... but what if Lazarus wasn't really dead? Jesus turned water into wine - unless he didn't. A thinking rational person should consider how the stories may in fact not be true at all. While this sort of

thinking seems to carry some to atheism, a destruction of faith as its foundations are broken down, let us suspend any conclusion or thought of that destination for now.

I would ask the preacher who is attempting to convince me on the basis of a Biblical miracle where Aaron's rod is turned into a serpent (Exodus 7:10-12), what would he say if Jesus suddenly appeared before us? What if Jesus then spoke and revealed that that story was just a dramatization by the writer and not at all literally true? Jesus reveals it never really happened. Would his faith be damaged? Would he reject God or, instead, consider it a sort of growth, an edification?

If Jesus suddenly appeared and clarified that the dead man in 2nd Kings (13:21) who was raised by the touching of Elisha's bones wasn't really dead in the first place or that the whole event didn't happen, that it was not a factual account, would our preacher's faith be thrown out and God rejected? What if God appeared and revealed clearly that Daniel was not really saved from a den of lions (Daniel 6:16-23), that it was merely an allegory to convey a lesson and not at all factually accurate? Would his belief in God be rejected or instead would he view this new information as bringing him closer to a new divine truth?

You see the point. One can literally go down a list, as if that were necessary, and find reason to reject every single claim, every story, miracle, report and accounting and quite literally discard all of the stories as an unnecessary encumbrance - all of it. The hubris of structured religion and the accomplice of preachers as well as the congregations and parishioners themselves in professing to know the intent, desire and even the methods of God, seems like a sacrilege, a heresy. All of the normal or common religious and spiritual types, the institution and all of its members, regularly operate on the basis of knowing firmly and reliably (or pretending to know) not only what God is about but, indeed, the very nature of God. He is this. He is that. He is working toward this, that and other things. Even when they say God "loves" you, it seems they have no ability to express it in any terms beyond the base, human frailty we all experience. Is God's love a human love or is the nature of it somehow different? Exactly what is it? Is God's justice somehow different than that which we work toward in our courts? Is mankind capable of conceiving of justice in the same manner and to the same extent as God? If yes, then how did we become so God-like? If no, then what do these phrases, these claims of God's love or God's justice, even mean? They mean nothing.

The bottom line is simple. We do not really know the nature of God nor His intentions. It isn't that God works in mysterious ways - it is more mysterious than that. The rejection of the movie version of God, the rejection of the quaint and colloquial God of our grandparents, along with the corruption, the institutional bias, the self-indulgence, superstition and ignorance of religious leaders and literally all preconceived notions of our supreme creator need not interfere with or be inconsistent with an enduring recognition that God does indeed exist. That is, reject it all and still believe in God. That is the simplicity. Reject the Biblical accounts? Rejecting the common cultural personification of God? Reject the quaint or trite notions of God from our ancestors? Fine. Reject it all. But, that doesn't mean God doesn't still exist. There can still be walnuts in the bag.

I don't believe this perspective has been offered. It is at least uncommon. I don't believe that people realize they do not need the encumbrance and baggage of all of the common and usual

norms and notions of accepting God. I seriously doubt that people understand how easy it is to simply let it go... let it all go - except God.

So, how then is one to explain God? You don't. How will one account for God's hand in directing our lives? Well, that's an easy one. You don't. One can't really account for that anyway so you just don't. It seems the height of conceit to think humans can reliably know the nature of all this anyway. How will we account for God's rewarding of the good and punishing the bad? How will we distinguish the holy from the evil? Well, a quick look at human history will show how well we've done with that. Does the record of human history convert the atheist or, instead, reinforce them? Does the sense that God distributes consequences to the deserving convince and convert the atheist? No.

So, what is the rationale on which we hang the very existence of God? Now, we're to it. This is the question.

The Conclusion

We must keep this simple. The simpler, the more one-dimensional, the better. I would suggest even that the simpler the notion, the more likely it is to be real. Like *Occam's Razor*, building-in more complexity seems more likely that such enhancements are of human origin and fraught with human error and misconception. So, let's keep it simple.

We exist. Air exists. Wood, light, dirt all exist. Planets exist - I've seen them. Stars, galaxies all exist. The universe exists. While we know very little, it doesn't take much education to realize that the universe exists and it exists with structure. It has form. There is balance. There are rules or laws (for example, the speed of light, the attraction of a proton and neutron, etc.) that are a part of the universe. That is, the existence of the universe and the laws that control and govern its existence all exist together. They are one. A star's mass having a gravitational field is as true for our Sun as it is for a star billions of light years distant and in exactly the same manner. That is, the universe does not exist as a random, fluctuating ever changing mess of unidentifiable stuff. The very notion is ridiculous. The universe exists as a structured thing. By all appearances, it seems to be a "constructed" thing. For me, form and structure imply plan and purpose. Form, structure and laws of existence are contrary to the chaos and disorder of randomness and spontaneity - at least so for me.

I know I didn't create it. If I could, I would. I didn't; I cannot. Something greater than myself did it. This is an important *a priori* principle. Something greater than even the universe itself must be the cause. The Cause... that from which the universe comes is the Cause. Whether elements within it were coordinated to bring me into existence or, instead, whether it was indeed designed in such a way as to make me possible, is all "above my pay grade." It is silly and presumptuous to think I could ever understand such things. I don't need to understand such things and, so long as I remain a human being, I will not understand such things. The Cause - that from which all things come - exists. But, like gravity does exist, we don't really understand it. To understand it, one must be like the Cause. I am not. To "know" it, in that way, one must BE the Cause and yet it is all certainly greater than me. Knowing my ignorance in these things defines my appropriate humble place compared to that from all things come.

The alternative is somehow that the universe is its own cause, its own origin, that it brought itself into existence. Whether a big bang or whatever, I cannot conceive of this as creating its own existence, its own origin. A thing without a cause. A random, spontaneous existence with no greater cause is beyond my ability to conceive. I see no other universes popping into and out of existence all of their own origins. Everything we see, everything we know, have ever known, have ever perceived, all exist according to a highly structured, logical set of laws and principles that have governed the universe since its embryonic birth. It's like a big erector set where structures are literally built from smaller structures, where movement, behavior, motion, temperature, matter and time are all governed by a set of rules. Some have made important achievements in understanding the nature of it (Newton, Einstein, Feynman) even though probably more remains as yet unknown. I cannot conceive of all this without that from which it all must come. I don't need to constrain or limit that Cause to earthly folly nor do I require Cecil B. DeMille to characterize it in some profound movie experience. No matter how I characterize it, it is greater than that.

I do not need to fully know the nature of the Cause. I recognize that I am not worthy on that level. I cannot conceive of the true nature and scope of that Cause. But, I do have a name for it. The simplicity of this is profound. The name of that cause is God. That from which I come is God. That from which the universe comes is God. While I accept creation as a thing of good, I don't presume to characterize the creator in human terms. God is God and I will remain in my subordinate role as I must. I merely strive to be worthy of it.

I do not need the parting of the Red Sea. From a historical perspective it is interesting and there are records for a great many things. These studies are, for me, an academic exercise - not a spiritual one. I do not need Jonah or the great fish (Jonah 2:1-10). I do not need Charlton Heston's great portrayal of Judah Ben Hur nor his raising of Moses' staff to the skies to affect an escape from the pharaoh. I do not need what God thinks about cutting grass on Sundays in order to believe. As far as I can tell, he has no preference either way. I do not need to know if something is predetermined about me moving to Cincinnati or not. It is my problem and I accept that responsibility along with my responsibility to make it a good thing.

To deny the existence of God is to deny that from which all things come. Regardless of the likelihood or the doubtful presence of walnuts in the bag, I see that the bag has contents and I don't choose to describe it further as to do so is to limit and restrict it with silly assumptions and prejudices drawn from my own limited existence. It is not necessary in the rejection of all human invention of religion and human intrusion on the deity to also reject the existence of God. One can just simplify the concept, simplify the notion itself. Reject that which is of human origin, invented to ease our fears, to explain our frailties, to create purpose, to justify our own actions, prejudices, conquests and failings.

Reject it all - but one is still left with two inescapable realities - in my opinion. First, the universe and all it contains does exist. Second, the Cause of that existence is the Creator. You can stop there. Welcome to God.

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