

# APOLOGETICS: GIVING A REASON FOR OUR HOPE

TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

- Outline

- Can the existence of God be proven?
- The Naturalist worldview
- Reasons to believe in God's existence -
  - God and existence
  - God and values
  - God and morality
  - God and reason
    - Compare the Naturalist and Christian worldviews
- Main argument: If God isn't real then *nothing* makes any sense in this world.
  - A word about presentation
  - Not exhaustive
  - Not generic theism

# CAN GOD BE PROVEN?

- Skeptic's challenge: "I would believe if God provided overwhelming evidence for his existence. But there's as much evidence for God's existence as there is for the Yeti."
  - What the challenge fails to recognize: God is a fundamentally different kind of being than a Yeti
    - The way in which we prove something's existence depends on its nature
    - Example: The Yeti – if it's real, it's a *physical* being that exists in time and space as part of the physical universe.
      - It could be observed through any of the five senses; it could leave indirect *physical* evidence.
  - God cannot be proven in the same way as a physical creature within the universe
    - He isn't part of the universe; he created the universe.
    - He isn't constrained by space and time; he created both.
    - He isn't finite and limited; he is infinite in all his attributes.

# CAN GOD BE PROVEN?

- God's attribute of self-existence
  - What this means: Everything other than God depends on God for its existence, but God depends on nothing for his existence. God simply *is* (Exodus 3:14).
- So how can God's existence be proven?
  - Every aspect of our lives cannot be made sense of unless God exists.
  - Even though God is not directly perceived like the ordinary things within this universe, we cannot make sense of the universe and our experience unless he exists.
  - Argument: Only the Christian worldview centered on a transcendent, perfect, personal, rational, moral Creator can make sense of the things we take for granted all the time.

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

- What difference does God's existence make? All the difference!
  - Example: The Yeti – no real significance if it does or does not exist.
  - In contrast, if the God of the Bible exists, it affects *everything* because of who God is.
    - It means everything depends for its existence and nature on God.
    - It means that ultimate reality is *personal* and *rational* and *moral*.
    - It means that the universe gets its existence, its meaning, its direction, its intelligibility, and its moral character from God.
      - Life isn't a meaningless accident.
      - Humanity isn't just another animal trying to preserve its gene pool.
      - Morality isn't subjective or illusory.
- There is nothing more significant for our understanding of the world and ourselves than God's existence.

# THE WORLDVIEW OF NATURALISM

- Naturalism is arguably the most prominent alternative in Western society (at least in certain circles)
- What is Naturalism? “The cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be.”
  - TAKES?

# THE WORLDVIEW OF NATURALISM

- The worldview of Naturalism

- No transcendent Creator; the physical universe is ultimate reality.
  - The universe either (1) came into existence out of nothing with no prior cause or (2) the universe has always existed in some form or other.
- Humanity is the product of evolutionary processes.
- Everything in the universe can be explained scientifically in terms of physics, biology, and chemistry.
- Our sense of ethics is another evolutionary development.

# THE WORLDVIEW OF NATURALISM

- Naturalism: reality is ultimately non-personal, non-rational, and non-moral.
  - The universe we live in has no ultimate explanation, meaning, purpose, direction, or significance. It came from nowhere and its heading nowhere.
  - Implications for people: like every other species on the planet, we are a cosmic accident, without purpose or significance. The only purpose to your life is one you make up.
    - You can decide your purpose is to cure cancer or discover the tastiest food or get as much pleasure as you can at other people's expense. It's all ultimately arbitrary because the *universe doesn't care*.



# THE WORLDVIEW OF NATURALISM

- The Implications of the Naturalist Worldview (Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions*)

Is there a God? No.

What is the nature of reality? What physics says it is.

What is the purpose of the universe? There is none.

What is the meaning of life? Ditto.

Why am I here? Just dumb luck.

# THE WORLDVIEW OF NATURALISM

Does prayer work? Of course not.

Is there a soul? Is it immortal? Are you kidding?

Is there free will? Not a chance!

What happens to us when we die? Everything pretty much goes on as before, except us.

What is the difference between right and wrong, good and bad? There is no moral difference between them.

Does history have any meaning or purpose? It's full of sound and fury, but signifies nothing.

# REASONS FOR BELIEVING GOD EXISTS

- Approach: Identify something that we take for granted in our lives and explain why we need God in order to make sense of that thing.
  - God and existence
  - God and values
  - God and morality
  - God and reason

# 1. GOD AND EXISTENCE

- Why does anything exist at all? What accounts for the universe?
  - Observation: the universe and everything in it is *contingent*.
    - A contingent thing is something or someone that might not have existed even though it does in fact exist.
    - Example: The Johnstown Inclined Plane – it didn't have to exist, and it is possible that it will not exist in the future.
    - Human beings are contingent beings. Physical objects in the universe are contingent objects.
  - The existence of a contingent thing begs the question, "Why?"
    - The answer must come from outside that thing because it makes no sense to say that something brought itself into existence since it would have to already exist in order to do anything at all.
    - The existence of every contingent thing has to be explained by some *other* thing – that other thing must be either contingent or non-contingent (something that might not have existed or something that must exist)
    - If the universe as a whole is contingent, there needs to be an explanation for *why* it exists and that explanation cannot come from the universe itself.

# 1. GOD AND EXISTENCE

- The problem of existence: Why does anything exist at all? What accounts for the universe?
  - The answer of Naturalism
    - Naturalism has no explanation for the existence of the universe and thus no explanation for anything.
    - Naturalism forbids any explanation for the existence of the universe since it insists there's nothing beyond the universe that could explain its own existence.

# 1. GOD AND EXISTENCE

- The problem of existence: Why does anything exist at all? What accounts for the universe?
  - The answer of Christianity
    - God exists.
    - God is not a contingent being.
    - God freely chose to use his unlimited power to bring the universe into existence.

# 1. GOD AND EXISTENCE

- The problem of existence: Why does anything exist at all?
  - Unpacking the Christian answer
    - Because God is a fundamentally different kind of being than the universe, the puzzle of existence finds a coherent answer.
    - The universe is not self-existent; it has to derive its existence from some other source.
    - God by his very nature is self-existent.
    - The Christian worldview can account for the existence of the universe, and the truth that something exists is a compelling reason to believe that a self-existent, all-powerful God exists.

## 2. GOD AND VALUES

- Observation: We all make value judgments without even thinking about it.
  - Good or bad, perfect or evil, commendable or condemnable.
  - Some value judgments are subjective – they depend on our own personal tastes or preferences.
    - Examples: foods, movies, hobbies



## 2. GOD AND VALUES

- Observation: We all make value judgments without even thinking about it.
  - Some value judgments are objective – we're saying that something is good or bad regardless of anyone's personal tastes or preferences.
    - Examples: discovery of antibiotics (good) | Holocaust (bad or even evil)
    - People do not believe these value judgments are merely matters of personal taste
  - People may disagree about which things are objectively good or bad, but the fact is everything makes some objective value judgments.
    - Even the person who denies objective values must make objective value claims ("Toleration of diversity is good.")

## 2. GOD AND VALUES

- What do value judgments have to do with God's existence?
  - Argument: Any objective value judgment assumes an objective standard or criterion of judgment – some objective standard of goodness by which things can be judged.
  - The standard by which we make value judgments must be independent of us, otherwise it wouldn't be an objective standard.
    - Value judgments can't be grounded in human desires, feelings, personal or cultural preferences.
    - Discuss: *Why not?*

## 2. GOD AND VALUES

- What do value judgments have to do with God's existence?
  - The Crucial Question: Which worldview makes sense of our objective value judgment?
    - Which worldview is most consistent with our belief that some things are objectively good and other things are objectively bad?
    - Which worldview affirms an absolute standard of goodness?

## 2. GOD AND VALUES

- The Crucial Question: Which worldview makes sense of our objective value judgment?
  - The answer of Naturalism
    - There is no objective standard for value judgments (ultimately reduces to subjectivism, personally or collectively)
    - If the universe came from nothing and has no objective meaning or purpose, what sense does it make to say that some things are objectively good or bad?
    - If the universe is ultimately non-rational, non-person, and non-moral, what basis could there be for objective value judgments?

## 2. GOD AND VALUES

- The Crucial Question: Which worldview makes sense of our objective value judgment?
  - The answer of Christianity
    - God is absolutely good and he exists independently of the universe.
    - Therefore, God is the absolute, ultimate and objective standard of goodness by which things can be evaluated.
    - Something is objectively good if it reflects the character of God and conforms to the revealed will of God.
    - Something is bad if it is opposed to God's character or revealed will.

### 3. GOD AND MORALITY

- Observation: All people make moral judgments about other people's decisions and actions.
- Argument: Our moral judgments presuppose objective moral norms.
  - Example: "What the Islamic State has done to innocent civilians in Iraq and Syria is wrong." – We don't simply mean it's wrong for us or for them. We mean that it's morally wrong, period. It's not a matter of taste.

### 3. GOD AND MORALITY

- Observation: All people make moral judgments about other people's decisions and actions.
- Argument: Our moral judgments presuppose objective moral norms.
  - Example: "Abortion is wrong" or "Abortion is not wrong." – both presuppose a moral standard.
  - Note: The moral argument doesn't require that an unbeliever have correct moral presuppositions. As long as they have any moral opinion at all, they are presupposing objective moral norms.

### 3. GOD AND MORALITY

- Observation: All people make moral judgments about other people's decisions and actions.
- Argument: Our moral judgments presuppose objective moral norms.
  - Any time we make moral judgments we're assuming there are moral laws which *transcend* human opinion and human societies.



# 3. GOD AND MORALITY

- Definitions

- Norm – a standard or criterion of evaluation (something is normal when it conforms to a norm)
  - When we make an “ought” statement or “should” statement, we are applying an assumed norm.
- Objective norms – a norm that is independent of human thoughts, feelings or desires; it is not a matter of personal feeling or opinion.
  - What are some of the norms that we use?
    - Norms of morality: “You shouldn’t tell lies.” – relies on a moral norm
    - Norms of reason: “Your thinking is irrational.” – relies on rational norms
    - Norms of purpose: “The refrigerator shouldn’t be freezing the butter.” - relies on teleological norms

### 3. GOD AND MORALITY

- Why do there have to be absolute norms of morality?
  - Non-absolute (relative) norms are always subject to evaluation at a higher level.
  - Absolute norms (by definition) are not subject to evaluation at a higher level.
  - Therefore, non-absolute (relative) norms are ultimately dependent on absolute norms.
    - *Examples:* government legislation, parental instructions, pastoral instruction are relative norms which we all assume are subject to absolute norms.
    - The point: there has to be an absolute moral norm to make any moral judgment at all!

### 3. GOD AND MORALITY

- If norms of morality were grounded in *non-absolute* persons (culturally or individually), then they would not be *absolute* (i.e., they would lack necessity and ultimate authority).
  - Example: If you say rape is wrong, who's to say that in another culture rape couldn't be morally acceptable?
  - The point: We rely on absolute moral norms because if morality is merely subjective, then it can vary.

### 3. GOD AND MORALITY

- Norms are grounded in persons; you can't have norms without person(s) behind the norms.
  - Speed limit signs – where does the normative force of a speed limit sign come from?
  - Household rules – normative rules created by parents
  - The refrigerator freezing butter – purpose norms, the fridge has a personal designer who determines its function and purpose
    - All these different kinds of norms require persons to give them force and meaning
    - Normative statements raise the question: “Says who?”

### 3. GOD AND MORALITY

- Norms are grounded in persons; you can't have moral norms without moral person(s) behind the norms.
  - Moral norms have force that generates obligations, duties, accountability.
    - How could something impersonal impose obligations and duties on us?
    - How could we be accountable to an impersonal force?
    - How can materialist worldviews account for objective moral norms? The laws of physics describe how things function, but can't impose any moral obligations on us.

### 3. GOD AND MORALITY

- How do we account for objective moral norms?
  - The answers of Naturalism
    - Option #1: Bite the bullet and accept that there are no objective moral norms
    - Options #2: Moral judgments can be determined by cultural conventions (societal agreement about morality) – cultural subjectivism
    - Options #3: Moral judgments can be determined by human happiness (whatever gives people the most pleasure and least pain) – personal subjectivism
      - Discussion: *What are the flaws of these options?*

# 3. GOD AND MORALITY

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    - Options #3: Moral judgments can be determined by human happiness (whatever gives people the most pleasure and least pain)
      - Discussion: What are the flaws of these options?
        - (1) No one consistently accepts that there are no objective moral norms (option #1)
        - (2) We make moral judgments that transcend cultural conventions all the time (option #2)
        - (3) There is no moral ground to object to someone who finds happiness in your pain (options #3)

### 3. GOD AND MORALITY

- How do we account for objective moral norms?
  - The answer of Christianity
    - There are absolute moral norms because there is a personal, moral Absolute (God).
      - Another way of putting it: There are transcendent moral laws because there is a transcendent moral law-giver.
    - Moral laws cannot come from an impersonal source.
    - Moral laws cannot be absolute if they come from a non-absolute source,
    - God is personal and absolute; therefore there are real moral norms grounded in God.
- Conclusion: We can't make sense of objective moral values unless the Christian God exists.



### 3. GOD AND MORALITY

“The long and the short of it is that I became convinced that atheism implies amorality; and since I am an atheist, I must therefore embrace amorality. ... A ‘soft atheist’ would hold that one could be an atheist and still believe in morality. And indeed, the whole crop of ‘New Atheists’ are softies of this kind. So was I, until I experienced my shocking epiphany that the religious fundamentalists are correct: without God, there is no morality. But they are incorrect, I still believe, about there being a God. Hence, I believe, there is no morality. ... If there were a God, His issuing commands would make some kind of sense. But if there is no God, as of course atheists assert, then what sense could be made of there being commands of this sort? In sum, while theists take the obvious existence of moral commands to be a kind of proof of the existence of a Commander, i.e., God, I now take the non-existence of a Commander as a kind of proof that there are no Commands, i.e., morality.” – Joel Marks, “An Amoral Manifesto”

## 4. GOD AND REASON

- Observation: Everyone reasons, but we take our ability to reason for granted.
- Argument: Our very ability to reason at all relies on the existence of the Christian God.
  - People take for granted their ability to reason: judge between truth and falsehood, decide what's reasonable and unreasonable, to use logic and evaluate evidence.

## 4. GOD AND REASON

- How do we account for our ability to reason?
  - The answer of Naturalism
    - Reason came from non-reason
    - Naturalists have to believe that rational beings arose out of entirely non-rational materials and processes.
    - The evolutionary explanation
      - Humans gradually developed the ability to reason over millions of years by a process of natural selection.
  - The answer of Christianity
    - Ultimate reality is rational because it has its source in a rational Mind – God.
    - People are made in God's image. One aspect of that image is our capacity to reason.

## 4. GOD AND REASON

- Discussion: *What are some of the problems with an evolutionary account of reason?*

#1 Most of the organisms on this planet survive and reproduce perfectly well without the slightest ability to reason like we do.

#2 An evolutionary account of reason undermines the reliability of human reason.

- What is the purpose of reason according to Naturalism? Survival. Reason is survival-oriented, not truth-oriented.
- Why should we think our reason will lead us to true beliefs?

#3 Why did evolution give us the capacity to understand advanced calculus, music theory, poetry and philosophy? None of those things confer any obvious survival advantage.

- The Crucial Question: Which worldview gives us the most reasonable account of reason itself?

## 4. GOD AND REASON

“The Naturalist faces a conundrum. Either evolution is truth-directed or it isn't. If evolution isn't truth-directed, then the Naturalist has no basis for assuming that his intellectual faculties can be trusted to guide him towards truth, in which case he ought to doubt the truth of his own beliefs – including his belief in Naturalism! But if evolution is (somehow) truth-directed, we have to wonder why most people today are religious. Why has evolution tended to favor beliefs which, according to Naturalists, are so radically out of step with reality?” – James Anderson

## 4. GOD AND REASON

“Natural selection does not care about truth; it cares only about reproductive success.” (Stephen Stich, *The Fragmentation of Reason*)

“The idea that one species of organism is, unlike all the others, oriented not just toward its own increased prosperity but toward Truth, is as un-Darwinian as the idea that every human being has a built-in moral compass – a conscience that swings free of both social history and individual luck.” (Richard Rorty, “Untruth and Consequences,” *The New Republic*)

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# THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

- Defense: The Design-Regress Objection
  - Objection: “Christians claim that the universe is too complex to have come about by chance, so it must have a supernatural designer. But surely the designer would have to be at least as complex as the universe! So who designed the designer? The only way to avoid an infinite regress is to accept that there can be complexity and order without a designer.”
  - Question: How does a proper biblical understanding of God’s nature provide an answer to this objection?



# THE EXISTENCE OF THE BIBLICAL GOD

- Defense: The “Moral Monster” Objection
  - Objection: “The God of the Bible is a moral monster! He curses the entire human race just because Adam ate the wrong fruit, he orders Abraham to sacrifice his own son, he demands the death penalty for picking up sticks on the Sabbath and for insulting your parents, and he orders the Israelites to commit genocide against the Canaanites (including their women and children). He even sends his own son to die a gruesome, agonizing death on a cross!”
  - *Question:* How do we answer the objection?

# THE EXISTENCE OF THE BIBLICAL GOD

- Defense: The “Moral Monster” Objection

- Response #1: This isn't really an objection to the existence of God *as such*; it's only an objection to the way the Bible depicts God.
- Response #2: The objection doesn't fairly represent the character of the God of the Bible.
- Response #3: The objection assumes (at least implicitly) a non-Christian worldview.

# THE EXISTENCE OF THE BIBLICAL GOD

- Defense: The “Moral Monster” Objection
  - *Question*: Is this supposed to be an *external* or *internal* objection to Christianity?
    - *External* objection: God is judged by external (non-Christian) moral standards.
      - The objector needs to justify those moral standards within the context of his own worldview (which is typically a non-theistic worldview).
    - *Internal* objection: God is judged by internal (Christian) moral standards.
      - The objector has to show that God is immoral *by Christian moral standards*; but Christian moral standards are based on the Bible!