



God



God

Bible

World

Jesus

Faith

BC is a series of five studies that parallel a faith journey toward Jesus Christ. Each builds on the one before, and interested readers will find themselves somewhere on the path.

This first study starts at the very beginning, exploring whether it is reasonable to believe God exists.

God

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made ... (Romans 1:19-20)

Christian faith explores truths as vast as the universe and as deep as the human soul, resting everything on the single most influential man who ever lived: Jesus Christ. The journey to find him is the most significant trek a person can make. Where to start? For some, the journey begins with the question of God's very existence. I know, because that is where mine began. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss with you so profound, and so intimate, a thing.

If the reality of God seems self-evident, this booklet will be of minimal interest to you and you may want to just move on to the next one in the series. But if the reality of God is not obvious, I will offer some thoughts about the biblical assertion at the top of this page, that God's existence can be "clearly perceived ... in the things that have been made." We'll look at two general categories of observation: what we perceive in the universe at large, and what we perceive within ourselves.

Order in the Universe

Virtually every observation a person can make of the natural world around us, from the most meticulous to the most casual, reveals astounding order. Complex but discernible structure marks everything from galactic swirls to extreme sports to expert baking.

Order is most breathtakingly evident in the phenomenon of life. Study of the DNA molecule reveals a truly astounding storehouse of information and design. Each DNA molecule defines the physical characteristics of our individual body with a genetic code three *billion* characters long! Just reading the code within one cell at a rate of three characters a second would take 31 years, reading day and night.

The sciences quantify observations about life with impressive numbers, or encapsulate them in beautiful models. But it only takes an ear to discover the summer ecosystem in the back yard, or an eye to appreciate the vastness of the night sky.

Sages of old mused that it would be as ludicrous to deny the existence of an intelligent Creator as it would be to find a pocket watch lying in the woods and then deny the existence of a watchmaker. If a watch could not “just happen” by itself, how could life? How could the entire orderly universe?

Today it is not so fashionable to speak of divine watchmakers. Today, the fashion is rather to speak of natural (random chance based) evolution. Evidence clearly argues for a universe appreciably older than suspected by our forefathers. And it certainly looks like life on Earth has appeared in stages of increasing complexity (something first described in the beginning of Genesis). But why assume that this is the result of random chance rather than intelligence? When we look back at the development of punch cards through to touchscreens, we assume that a great deal of intelligent thought guided the evolution of computers, not random chance.

But an artificial polarization of science and religion screams that the increasing complexity of life has to be a result of blind chance—intelligent design is disallowed as unscientific. The mantra is that order occurs entirely by random chance mutations, with the most efficient mutation surviving. That is, minute and improbable

accidents accumulate over time, with natural selection causing these accidents to piggyback on one another in just the right way so as to eventually produce amino acids, cells, moss, insects, whales and eventually humans. Since that “explains” the universe in terms of blind chance, it is claimed that there is no compelling evidence of God to find. Even more modern adaptations of the theory of evolution are crafted to reject a guiding intelligence in favor of some combination of random events.

But does that even make sense?

The theory of evolution has, indeed, accumulated a large body of data to support its assertions concerning the age of the universe and the progression of life from simple to complex. But the notion that complexity arises from random chance is also asserted as equally scientific, when it is nothing of the sort. In fact, the notion of extreme complexity arising out of chance is nonsense. It becomes the preferred choice only when the alternative, intelligent design, is arbitrarily disqualified as “unprovable” (regardless of how well it fits the observable facts).

There are branches of mathematics and physics devoted to the study of chance and the probabilities of random events in the real world. One of the fundamental conclusions of these studies is that things do not randomly tend to order themselves. Over time, things predictably tend to disorder themselves. (Which is more likely to happen in response to a light breeze: a house of cards falling down in a scrambled heap, or a scattered heap of cards arranging themselves into a fragile structure?)

Most people, of course, do not make a scientific study of order and chaos. Evolutionists typically distract us from questioning the theory’s unlikely dependence on random events by touting the immensely long time since the universe began—several billion years. We all know enough about probability to know that an unlikely, but possible, event is more likely to occur as the amount

of time increases. Billions of years sounds like a very long time, indeed. Outside of the sciences, people do not use “billion” to describe anything concrete except government spending, so the number seems overwhelming. “Yes,” we think, “an accumulation of positive accidents is unlikely, but surely anything could spontaneously spring out of a universe so unthinkably old!”

The logic that drives confidence in evolution-by-chance is reflected in a well-known statement attributed to Thomas Huxley, among others. He said that if a million monkeys were permitted to strike the keys of a million typewriters for a million years, they might very well by chance duplicate a Shakespearean play. Admittedly, human life is astronomically more complex than the proposed achievement of the monkeys, but the example serves to assert a principle: billions of years is enough time for anything to happen, no matter how unlikely. The argument sounds very convincing.

Huxley might have been embarrassed to know that a simple thought experiment can put his argument to the test. It’s called “the infinite monkey theorem”—you can look it up online. We discover that the monkeys could, indeed, come up with anything over time, but that the time involved for random order is incomprehensibly huge. To quote Wikipedia, “If there were as many monkeys as there are atoms in the observable universe typing extremely fast for trillions of times the life of the universe, the probability of the monkeys replicating even a *single* page of Shakespeare is unfathomably small.”

Here is another example, again applying very basic probability theory in a way that attempts to illustrate the “unfathomable” numbers involved. This time, the monkeys have typewriters with only capital letters, seven punctuation marks and a space key. We allow them to type twenty-four hours a day at the speed of twelve and a half keys per second. Instead of a Shakespearean play, the

experiment only requires them to type the first verse of Genesis in English, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"—ten words. Not much of a challenge compared to the human nervous system, but Huxley was, after all, only trying to make a point. To see what point his assertion actually makes when tested, consider ...

"The length of time it would take is indeed quite beyond our comprehension but an illustration may help. Think of a large mountain which is solid rock. Once a year a bird comes and rubs its beak on the mountain, wearing away an amount equivalent to the finest grain of sand (about .0025 inch in diameter). At this rate of erosion the mountain would disappear very slowly, but when completely gone the monkeys would still be just warming up.

"Think of a rock not the size of a mountain but a rock larger than the whole earth, larger than the whole solar system. Try to think of a rock so large that if the earth were at its center its surface would touch the nearest star. This star is so far away that light coming from it takes more than four years to get here, traveling 186,000 miles every second. If a bird came once every thousand years and removed an amount equivalent to the smallest grain of sand, more than four hundred such rocks would be worn away before our champion super simians would be expected to type Genesis 1:1.

If single spaced on one side of a page, the paper used in this typing would make a mass so large that something moving at the speed of light would take as long to penetrate it as all the time the geology books allow since the fossil record began."¹

Compared to the time necessary to randomly type Genesis 1:1, the 14 billion year age of the universe is insignificant. The point is that the time required to randomly order life, such as the three billion sequenced base pairs of a DNA molecule is, I believe, literally unimaginable. It could not reasonably happen in a universe only a few billion years old.

Science is supposed to follow the evidence, not stubbornly perpetuate outmoded theories. At issue is not the assertion that life gradually appeared over geological time, but the notion that life developed *by chance*. Chance-based evolution is a form of blind faith, crossing the line from science into irrational bias. It's true that the concept of intelligent design, by itself, does not "prove" the biblical Creator. But intelligence is a far better candidate than random chance to explain the universe we actually see, and the only intelligence we know of is associated with personal beings.

Let me move on from what we observe "out there" to something more intimate: what we observe within ourselves, within our own conscious being ...

The Person Inside of Me

The reality of God was the last thing on my mind at 2 am in the Computer Science building at the University of Maryland. A freshman in 1969, I was working on a computer programming assignment due the next day.

The first year of college is a big deal for anyone, but for me it meant pursuing a quest already a decade old. Since childhood I had an unquenchable thirst for meaning. How did the universe come to be? What was life all about? I yearned to understand the grand design behind all things.

Although these are traditionally religious questions, I had no interest in religion. To me, religion was nothing more than

subjective superstition, not to be taken seriously. It might have its social uses, but it had nothing to do with the substance of reality. Since divinity was supposed to be outside of the material universe, “God” was not part of anything I considered to be real. All that existed was matter and energy in a completely closed system. No room for God there. No, I was certain that the answers to my questions were to be found in the sciences, not in faith.

Science had an almost mystical air about it when I was a kid growing up in the '50's. In those days, technology was the intellectually acceptable stage for any serious dialog about life. TV's *Mr. Wizard* was my affectionate model of a wise mentor. Even in fiction, TV shows like *Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits* dealt with metaphysical concepts costumed as science, not religion or philosophy. I have particularly vivid memories of the 1964 World's Fair in New York, an audio-visual showcase for science that left a powerful impression. Exalting mankind's scientific potential to epic proportions, it promised a technological answer to every significant question.

Science was the way to find objective beauty, order and meaning. That is why I read every book on physical science in the Annapolis Public Library. When my parents casually asked me while driving one evening what I wanted to be when I grew up, I announced from the back seat, “I want to be a theoretical physicist majoring in quantum dynamics.” Quite a mouthful for a ten year old in 1960.

I finally made it to college in the pursuit of my dream, where I eventually earned a degree in physics, Phi Beta Kappa. It was there, too, as a freshman that I experienced my first love affair—with computers. To think of all the secrets, all the meaning that could be uncovered with computers! Those were the days before terminals, of course. Interaction was limited to keypunch machines and the

card stacks they generated. But any access to those wonders of technology was amazing.

That love affair was strained, however, as I sat there at 2 am striving to exterminate the last bugs from a frustrating assignment. As my eyes scanned the latest printout, I noticed that someone had tinkered with the computer's operating system. Instead of reporting standard error messages, it dished out mild abuse: "Stupid!", "Try again," that sort of thing. I had stumbled on the work of one of the very first hackers!

I found the practical joke amusing and toyed absent-mindedly with how to imitate such mischief if given the chance. The technique was transparently simple, just locate the memory locations of the error messages and change the content. After all, the computer has no idea what those messages mean ...

... my thinking stopped dead in its tracks

If you have ever found a picture in a mass of ink blots or witnessed familiar forms appearing in clouds, you know how I felt at that moment. An insight unexpectedly materialized from nowhere—an insight that rocked my foundations and brought down everything I believed into ruin. In retrospect, I cannot explain why this truth never hit me before, but that night it hit me hard.

What I realized was that the computer didn't mean what it said. It called me "stupid" instead of informing me that a variable had been undeclared, but it didn't really think me stupid. It was merely executing a subroutine that responded to errors by taking whatever was stored in a given memory location and printing it out on piece of paper. Anything stored in that location would be printed: "Undeclared variable", "stupid", "Error #1583", "#@*^&+", "To be, or not to be" ... anything. The computer didn't mean anything by what it printed.

Some *person* meant something. The original programmer intended to give a clue to assist in debugging, and the more recent

hacker intended to give a chuckle. But the computer itself was just a closed system of mere matter and energy. As such, its every action was completely determined in a mechanistic way. It was incapable of intending or meaning anything.

My mind had conceived of the whole universe as a closed system of only matter and energy—a super machine, if you will—like the university’s computer, only larger. I thought myself part of that system, a biochemical cog in the big machine.

But at that moment, the simple realization dawned on me that if my assumptions about reality were true, then the idea of “meaning” was meaningless, an illusion with no real substance. There was no *person* to give meaning, only matter and energy in a closed system. No person to give meaning to *anything*. Therefore, no person inside my own head to give meaning to the thoughts I was thinking about meaning!

If my previous assumptions were true, then my mind was running its program as mechanistically as the university’s computer. The Univac 1108 didn’t know proper debugging from a practical joke. If my thoughts at that moment were nothing more than a memory dump of selected brain cells, how could I know that they made any sense? How could I know whether my electrical and neural patterns produced rational thoughts? How could I even know what *rational* means? Whether my thoughts reflected a true or false equation, affection or hatred, poetry or gibberish—whatever they were, they could have no more meaning than the college computer’s mindless comment that I was stupid.

What difference can it make whether a human-shaped computer spits out “I love you” or “Lynch him!” or “gorphmxyql”? There is absolutely no objective meaning, purpose or value in the bare existence of matter and energy. A machine can process data, but it cannot create any true, objective meaning out of its data.

Significance, purpose, meaning—these are ideas associated with *persons*, not machines. There is no place for a soul in a machine. Those who say there is have actually given up on the notion of personhood, and with it any hope of objective meaning and significance.

Machines cannot create real meaning because they are completely controlled by physical forces which, while they may be consistent, have no *intrinsic* purpose. Random interactions of these forces in larger and larger systems increase complexity, but gain no purpose. Purpose has to be given to machines by a person. A giant supercomputer may work on projects of great importance, but the importance of its work is defined by its human programmers. If the programmers went away and never came back, the supercomputer would lose all significance, even if it continued to rerun the same programs until it melted down. Machines mean nothing without the “why” supplied by a person.

To be sure, the idea of a soul creates its own massive set of questions and problems, as complex and mysterious as any in physics or astronomy. But at least persons can *have* meaningful questions and seek meaningful answers. Machines cannot. Unless there is a person inside of me to give the “why” to my actions and define my purpose, none of my thoughts and actions can have any meaning whatsoever. Even thoughts about meaning have no meaning.

You see what a bombshell had exploded in my face. That night, I unexpectedly realized that in a world based on my thoroughly mechanistic presuppositions, there was no room for real persons. Not one. Not even me. And if there is no room for persons, there is no room for meaning, and hence, for reason. Without persons, nothing can really make any sense at all, because the ability to create “sense” would not exist. A denial of personhood implies that reason is only an illusion.

There was a moment in which I wanted to resist, to retain my conviction that biological machines can create meaning. But that cannot be done. C. S. Lewis concisely summarized the problem: “If my mental processes are determined wholly by the motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true ... and hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms.”² Asserting that “natural laws” are *all* that exist is an assertion that undercuts any possibility of rational thought. Therefore, the assertion is nonsense. It is an assertion that cannot even be discussed without assuming it is wrong. I realized there could be no turning back once I saw this.

Do not suppose that this discovery was accompanied by some kind of religious joy. It was not. All that happened was that my search from meaning broadened from traditional scientific exploration. My atheistically “scientific” worldview was not as scientific as I thought! It had doggedly maintained assumptions which could not account for the most fundamental observation I could make ... me!

Now I had to find an adequate cause for personhood—souls, if you will. A machine may build a machine, but a machine cannot build a person. Years later, I heard an analogy by Dr. Francis Schaeffer that described this simple truth. He pictured three mountain ranges with two valleys separating them. Imagine, he said, that one valley is filled halfway up the slopes with water. As you watch, you see water begin to fill the other valley. If the water in the second valley stops rising at the height of the water in the first valley, then you would suspect that a channel connects the two, and that the first body of water is the source, or cause, of the second. But if the water in the second valley rises higher than the water level in the first, you would discount the possibility of a connecting channel. In that case, the first valley could not possibly provide an adequate source for the other valley’s water.

Every effect needs a sufficient cause. If humanity is more than a random accident, if real persons do exist, then there must be an adequate *personal* cause. The water level of personhood is considerably higher than the water level of biological machinery. What is the source for personhood? There must be a Person behind all persons like myself.³

This was not fun. I now had more questions than ever. What kind of a Person is this God? How can I know God? Is God good? How can someone all-powerful allow the mess of pain and evil that infects this planet?

Nevertheless, what I observe inside myself builds on what I observe in the outside world. Life demonstrates a powerful, intelligent Cause, while my own existence clearly demonstrates that this Cause is a Person—someone we call God.

Now I had to deal with that.

Suppressing the Truth

Perhaps, like me, you have been used to brushing off the concept of God as one of the world's superstitions. Perhaps you believe God is only a concept created by people who emotionally need such a foundation. But emotional need (however real) has nothing to do with it. If there is no God, then nothing can ultimately *matter*, nothing at all. Intellectually, I must either recognize the existence of a personal God or resign myself to a world that cannot make sense, where life is an accident with no objective meaning and no meaningful future.

The thing is, that's not really a choice, for two reasons: First, I cannot rationally choose ideas which, themselves, negate reason. Second (and this one's the kicker), it is simply impossible to actually live according to such ideas. I *must* assume some purpose, significance and values for absolutely every choice I make. One may claim that there is no God, all the while buying milk and

getting the car fixed and writing Congress about environmental problems. But without God, why would any of those things matter? Without the Person of God to give the world (and me) meaning, I do not need milk to stay alive, or a car to keep a job, or a Congress to worry about an environment that all have no true significance.

I began to realize that being involved in the business of living *proved* that I did not really believe the atheistic philosophy I affirmed. I could propose the intellectual fiction of a mechanistic universe, but I could never approach actually living that way because the act of living assumes that life has purpose. I might live in anguish, not knowing what that purpose is, but I inherently know that I exist for *some* reason.

We all do. Even the existentialist who grieves over the absurdity of life does so with a passion and eloquence that demonstrates the meaningful personhood he or she denies. We can't escape it. Even suicide is a purposeful act betraying a person's confidence that he or she can do something meaningful. Even the act of passionately denying God's existence assumes a capacity for meaning that *assumes* God's existence.

This comes as quite a shock to atheists such as I was. Atheists deny God's existence and therefore reject any ground for objective meaning in the universe. But I now realized that I had been fooling myself, since I had never lived that way and never would.

But *why* did I go to such lengths to fool myself? Did I really think that God did not exist, or was I simply afraid of how inconvenient God might be? After all, God's existence certainly raises a lot of difficult and potentially inconvenient questions.

I made the startling discovery that my atheism was not, at root, an intellectual issue. It was a moral one, having more to do with my integrity. That night in the Computer Science Center, I began a journey that exposed my atheism as simple prejudice. But *why* was I so prejudiced against God?

Let me go back to the Bible passage I quoted at the beginning, this time drawing attention to its context ...

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. (Romans 1:18-20)

It's true. God's existence is perfectly obvious in his creation, whether I look at the world around me or the person inside of me. The reason I could not see this for so long was that I did not want to see it. I suppressed the truth, unconsciously perhaps, but firmly. The existence of God complicates a life that wishes to be independent, and I feared that complication. I internally denied that existence of God so effectively that I had convinced myself that my atheism was rational.

But no matter how much I wanted the independence of atheism, I could never live as though my thoughts were the purposeless product of random atomic collisions. I could play with such thoughts, but I could never truly believe them—my life proves it. All our lives prove it. We cannot escape the truth that God is real; all we can do is suppress it.

In summary, we perceive an overwhelming order around us and have an innate sense of personhood within us that cannot be accounted for without an intelligent and personal Creator God. The issue of religion is far down the road, but for now, the choice is disturbingly real: either we affirm what we see and affirm the

existence of God, or we deny God and deny what we see, including our very selves. Either God meaningfully exists, or I do not.

As I said earlier, this is not fun. Recognizing the existence of God creates a host of unwanted questions, for now comes the uncomfortable thought that I must deal with this God. Why have I suppressed the obvious truth of his being? Is there something wrong with God? Or is there something wrong with me?

Even more disturbing, why is the world such a mess? If God can be known through what he has made, then what does this broken and hurting planet say about him? Is God the Devil?

And if God is a Person, why do I not know him? Why don't we communicate? Why hasn't God spoken? Or has he?

Good questions! But they are good questions, meaningful questions, only because a personal God *does* exist. And since he is real, then there may also be real answers to find.

The next pamphlet in this series is entitled "Bible," and explores the concept of divine revelation as a source of reliable knowledge.

¹ This illustration is from Dr. Bolton Davidheiser, former Professor of Biology at Westmont and Biola Colleges. He took his mathematics from *An Introduction to Probability Theory and Its Implications*, by William Feller, New York: Wiley, 1950, I, p. 226.

² *Miracles*, by C. S. Lewis, the MacMillan Company, 1947, p. 22.

³ It would be more accurate to say that God must *at least* be a person. That is to say, the highest way I can relate to God is the level of my own personhood—my thinking and feeling and acting. God must be able to relate to me on this level because he made me. However, he surely has attributes quite beyond mine and my power to

comprehend. That is not a problem. I need not know God as well as he knows himself, as long as I know him as well as I can.



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All Bible quotations are from the ESV®