

God's Existence Outside of the Physical World

And His Ability to Act Within it

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The existence of God and the possibility of miracles are intertwined. Miracles could not occur without a God to act in a miraculous way. In today's culture, both at large and in Academia there is much debate and disagreement about the existence of God and the reasonable response to miracle claims. Miracle claims are often flatly rejected at least in part due to the influence of naturalism. Naturalism not only rejects miracles, but recognizes only the material as existing.

To properly address the possibility of miracles one must first establish that a God outside of the material universe exists responding to challenges along the way. With the broad use of the term it will be helpful to identify a proper definition of a miracle. Naturalism itself must be answered too before finally looking at the recognition of a miraculous event.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|--------|
| 1. The Cumulative Case Argument for God | Pg. 3 |
| 2. God and Miracles | Pg. 9 |
| 3. The challenge of Naturalism | Pg. 11 |
| 4. Evaluating a Miracle claim | Pg. 13 |
| 5. The Apologetic Value of Miracles | Pg. 14 |
| 6. Sources Cited | Pg. 15 |

The Cumulative Case Argument for God

Moral Arguments

The great author, thinker, and convert to Christianity C.S. Lewis, opened what is perhaps his most well-known work outside of the Chronicles of Narnia, with a very simple observation, “Every one has heard people quarrelling.”¹ For anyone who has encountered other individuals, the truth of this should be obvious. Lewis cites several examples, each reader could likely relate as well as provide examples from one’s own reconciliation. Of these examples “How’d you like it if anyone did the same to you?”² may call the reader to the golden rule common in some form in many religions but most well known as phrased in the positive and active sense by Jesus Christ, “Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.”³ After providing more examples, Lewis pointed out, “What interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man’s behavior does not happen to please him.”⁴ When a person feels wronged, it is more than a matter of preference, taste, or opinion, it isn’t subjective, and “He is appealing to some kind of standard of behavior which he expects the other man to know about.”⁵ If there is a moral law where did it come from? Theists claim that the moral law is grounded in a moral law giver, but other alternatives have been sought.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1952,1980. Pg. 3.

² IBID.

³ Luke 6:31 New American Standard Bible

⁴ Lewis pg. 3.

⁵ IBID.

Some attempt to ground morality as a subjective function of culture. If this is correct one runs into a serious problem, would one culture be able to claim another culture was immoral? How would we address the infamous war crimes for the Nazi's, where they not simply following the morality of their own culture? While some individuals may reject objective morality Lewis noted, "Whenever you find a man who says he does not believe in a real Right and Wrong you will find the same man going back on this a moment later."⁶ Providing an example he stated, "He may break his promise to you, but if you try breaking on to him he will be complaining 'It's not fair' before you can say Jack Robinson."⁷ One would be giving up much to commit to the idea that there was no objective morality that transcends cultures and individuals, and as Lewis pointed out, individuals don't live that way, and obviously in the case of the Nazi war crimes, societies who dealt with the aftermath of war, did in fact judge those who committed immoral acts.

Evolution has been suggested by others as the source of morality. This view too has difficulties. Many of the behaviors we view as immoral would actually be disadvantageous to passing on one's genes. Lewis dealing with this and a culturally relative view of morality in line instructed, "Think of a country where people were admired for running away in battle."⁸ Cowardice isn't an admired virtue. Rape, infidelity, and murder are recognized as immoral, and traumatic acts, yet all of these acts would spread ones genes, or limit the competition to spreading ones genetic material. Morality seems counter to evolution, and furthermore, if one

⁶ Lewis Pg. 6.

⁷ IBID.

⁸ IBID.

were to commit to this view, they would be left with the disarming result of a morality gained by evolution that would be geared towards survival and not truth in regards to rightness or wrongness of action.

The existence of Morality isn't the only evidence of God, but one of many evidences which together provide a cumulative case for His existence as well as reveal certain traits about Him. While exploring the origin of objective morality reveals character, pursuing the existence of the material universe uncovers immense power and eternity.

Cosmological Arguments

“Why is there something rather than nothing?”⁹ Asked G.W.F. Leibniz. The simple yet powerful question reflects a multitude of common ponderings, such as “why am I here?” that are wrestled by scholars and average men and woman alike. Theologian and Philosopher, Thomas Aquinas was not unaware of this issue when he pointed to a first cause. Beginning with motion he defined it as, “nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality.”¹⁰ Something had the potential to move, but did not until it was acted upon. To avoid an infinite regress of movers this chain would have to arrive at a starting point, Aquinas concluded, “it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understand to be God.”¹¹

⁹ G.W.F. Leibniz *Leibniz Selections*. Edited by Philip P. Wiener. New York, New York: Simon Schuster Trade, 1951. Pg. 527.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas. *Christian Apologetics an Anthology of Primary Sources*. Edited by Khaldoun A. and Meister, Chad V. Sweis. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012. Pg. 79.

¹¹ IBID.

Contemporary Apologist and Philosopher, William Lane Craig has popularized use of the Kalam Cosmological argument to demonstrate a first cause. He states, “Whatever begins to exist has a cause of its existence. The universe began to exist.”¹² Craig concludes “Therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.”¹³ Skeptics who counter that the universe is eternal itself face difficulties with the Kalam if properly understood. Craig stated that, “one cannot form an actually infinite collection of things by successively adding one member after another. Since one can always add one more before arriving at infinity it is impossible to reach actual infinity.”¹⁴ The first mover of Aquinas must be outside of the universe and time as we understand, and cannot be the temporal universe. If the universe had an infinite number of past days, there would always be one more yesterday before today arrived, we could actually get to the present.

Beyond merely a philosophical argument science has now found evidence of a beginning of the universe. Craig summarized the evidence in two parts, “the confirmation from the expansion of the universe and the confirmation from the thermodynamic properties of the universe.”¹⁵ While some have made challenges to this, Geisler and Turek in their joint work, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, point to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, or

¹² William Lane Craig. *Christian Apologetics an Anthology of Primary Sources*. Edited by

Khaldoun A. and Meister, Chad V. Sweis. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012. Pg. 82.

¹³ IBID.

¹⁴ IBID. 84.

¹⁵ IBID. 87.

Entropy. Because the “Universe has only a finite amount of energy,”¹⁶ they stated that, “the universe would be out of energy by now if it had been running from all eternity.”¹⁷ And used the analogy of a car with only a finite amount of gas, being able to only run a finite amount of time.

Teleological Arguments

Beyond the apparent the existence of the universe there is scientific evidence within the universe that shows evidence of design. Although the theory of Darwinian or macro evolution is widely accepted today, even Darwin was aware of some challenges to his theory, one of the most famous is the eye. Professor and author Michael J. Behe explained, “If a person were so unfortunate as to be missing one of the eye’s many integrated features, such as the lens, or iris, or ocular muscles, the inevitable result would be a severe loss of vision or outright blindness. So it was concluded that the eye could only function if it were nearly intact.”¹⁸

Darwin was aware of the problem, and his attempted solution is shared by modern proponents of evolution. Behe notes that he pointed to a diversity of eyes in nature included a simple depression that merely detected light or dark, “he did not even try to explain where his starting point for the simple light-sensitive spot came from. On the contrary Darwin dismissed the question of the eye’s ultimate origin.”¹⁹ With modern technology biochemists have

¹⁶ Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004. Pg. 76.

¹⁷ Geisler and Turek. Pg. 76

¹⁸ Behe. Pg. 99.

¹⁹ IBID.

uncovered microscopic complexity, “each of the anatomical steps and structures that Darwin thought were so simple actually involves staggeringly complicated biochemical process that cannot be papered over with rhetoric.”²⁰ Behe concluded that, “Darwin’s simple steps are now revealed to be huge leaps between carefully tailored machines.”

Using biochemical evidence Behe and others have provided evidence that they claim point to Intelligent Design. One of the pieces he uses is that of Irreducible complexity which is defined, as, “a single system which is composed of several interacting parts, and where the removal of any one of the parts causes the system to cease functioning.”²¹ Using the analogy of a mousetrap Behe explains that natural selection couldn’t have acted to produce certain biological simples, because all the parts had to be in place for these systems, such as Cilium, to function.

Arguments such as Behe’s are called Teleological arguments, which, “moves from design to a Designer.”²² Behe defines design as, “simply the purposeful arrangement of parts.”²³ Design arguments can take other forms as well, including fine tuning arguments. These arguments are

²⁰ Behe. Pg. 100.

²¹ IBID. 101.

²² Norman L. Geisler. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic , 1999. Pg. 714.

²³ IBID. 104.

based on “Highly precise and interdependent environmental conditions”²⁴ and together are, “known as the ‘Anthropic Principle.’”²⁵

God and Miracles

With these arguments in place it seems likely that the universe had a beginning, an external, and thus eternal cause. This would need to be a personal being, to have the ability to choose to act, design and fine tune. To accomplish the text of creation this unmoved mover would need to be immensely powerful, intelligent and wise. This sounds like a theistic description of God. While this line of reasoning doesn’t guarantee the Christian God, it resembles Him, and this is only a sample of the evidence which can point one to the conclusion that there is a personal God outside of the universe.

If God exists outside the universe there are two options, some type of Deism, in which there is a closed universe, or a type of Theism in which God interacts with his creation. Deism denies the involvement of the creator, but author Norman Geisler challenged, “A being who could bring the universe into existence from nothing could certainly perform lesser miracles if he chose to do so.”²⁶ Here we must also remember that the moral too provides information about God, namely his character, and his concern for our relationships with others. C.S. Lewis also noted that, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most

²⁴ Geisler and Turek. Pg.96.

²⁵ IBID.

²⁶ Geisler. Pg. 191.

probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”²⁷ Both God’s character, and our desire for him seem to rule out deism.

Miracles are claimed by most major religions. Since it is not ruled out that God could intervene and interact with his creation, these miracles, depending on their veracity, could be occurrences of that interaction or intervention. It is at this point that many would provide push back, or doubt. The miraculous as well as the historical are central to the basic claim of Christianity the former represented by the resurrection, and the later by the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

Before addressing challenges to the miraculous it is helpful to define what a miracle is and what it is not. Author Richard Purtill proposed, “To define a miracle as an event in which God temporarily makes an exception to the natural order of things, to show that God is acting.”²⁸ This definition is important because it limits a casual accreditation of a miracle to God, despite some poetic thought, the normal sunrise while being immensely atheistically pleasing, and perhaps showing design or pointing back to the miracle of its creation, is not itself a miracle. True miracles are, “an exception to the ordinary course of nature.”²⁹ These rare events are not ascribed to some other immaterial being in this definition, but only to God, and are demonstrative. Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the Apostles all had their ministries authenticated by miracles, other miracles involved a saving act, such as the parting of the red sea.

²⁷ Lewis. Pg. 136.

²⁸ Richard L. Purtill. In *Defense of Miracles*. Edited by Geivett, R. Douglas and Habermas, Gary R. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997. Pg. 63.

²⁹ IBID.

Their recognition isn't the issue though, as many didn't reject Jesus and the prophets before him, it is the intent of God that is important, not the reaction of the individual.

The Challenge of Naturalism

Many refuse to acknowledge miracles, be it the possibility of their occurrence, or believability. The most powerful challenges to miracles come from philosophical naturalism. Influential thinkers like, "Spinoza believed miracles are impossible because they are irrational. David Hume claimed that miracles are incredible. Rudolph Bultmann held that miracles are unhistorical and mythical"³⁰ and more recently "Antony Flew argued that miracles are unidentifiable."³¹ Hume and Flew may be the most well-known. Hume's argument being interpreted into two versions, a hard version which sees miracles as impossible because they violate the laws of nature, and a soft version which suggests miracles could not be believed even if they occurred as there would always be more evidence for the common, which lead to Flew's more recent arguments.

All these arguments are based on the presupposition of naturalism. Naturalism holds to the idea that there is only a material universe, no soul, no God, no miracles. This view has some difficulties. In Hume's arguments for example, it is assumed that the laws of nature cannot be violated, however the laws of nature do not appear to be strict and unbreakable, but are made up of our observations and understanding, and have been adjusted with scientific discovery. "Natural laws describe how nature generally behaves. They do not dictate how nature must

³⁰ Geisler. Pg. 521.

³¹ IBID.

always behave.”³² In arranging the argument in the way that Hume does, he begs the question and stacks the deck against the possibility of miracles occurring, by defining them out of existence in the hard form of his argument. To accept the soft form of the argument would put in the position of being able to overlook truth, and would work to eliminate anything rare, as the common would always be more observable and science could never adjust it’s understanding by rare phenomena.

The view has further problems than that. Naturalism fails its own test. “The very scientific naturalists who insist on explaining everything in terms of physical and chemical laws cannot explain their own scientific theories or laws in terms of mere physical and chemical processes.”³³ Or in short naturalism is, “a nonphysical theory about physical things”³⁴ which claims there are only physical things, it’s self-defeating.

The view faces more than a philosophical challenge, but faces the evidence for a beginning of the universe, as discussed in regards to the Kalam Cosmological argument earlier. To this, Geisler noted, “It seems self-defeating to admit a great miracle like creation and then to deny the possibility of lesser miracles.”³⁵

³² Geisler. Pg. 191.

³³ IBID. 521.

³⁴ IBID.

³⁵ IBID. 191.

Evaluating a Miracle Claim

Hume's, Flew's and other naturalistic arguments ignore what should be an obvious component of evaluating an individual miracle, and instead focus on the idea of miracles in a broader context. In doing so they ignore the inequality of miracle claims. A belief too recognizes that not all claims are equal. When evaluating a miracle one should begin an investigation of those who witnessed it, its effect and all relevant data around its occurrence.

For the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus one would examine the reliability of the Gospel writers, how were the text transmitted? Are there textual clues to support the idea that they were first century accounts? Do we have outside, corroborative evidence? In this stage of examination, if one presupposes there are no miracles, it would only eliminate a potential answer, not explain what happened, for a seeker of truth, the potential answers should be determined by where the evidence leads.

When considering a miracle, Christian author, Winfried Corduan suggested that a miracle be viewed as an "explanatory hypothesis."³⁶ He then adds, "Not all explanatory hypotheses are created equal."³⁷ For example, what best explains the dramatic change from the cowardly lot of disciples, mourning their fallen teacher, to bold evangelists willing to die for their belief that Jesus arose from the dead? What best explains Saul of Tarsus's dramatic conversation? Here potential solutions should be checked to see if they provide the best answer with the most

³⁶ Winfried Corduan. *In Defense of Miracles*. Edited by R. Douglas and Habermas, Gary R.

Geivett. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997. Pg. 105

³⁷ IBID.

explanatory power, it isn't good enough to come up with a non miraculous hypothesis that may have occurred and could explain some aspects as if it isn't powerful enough to explain the occurrence and all the reactions to the miracle to the same degree as another answer.

The Apologetic Value of a Miracle

Even Jesus used miracles as authenticators of his message, and not as a message itself. The apologetic Value of a miracle varies greatly on whom one is addressing, and would not be as effective if someone had not already accepted the possibility of God's existence. As Paul approached Mars Hill and the church at Corinth differently, a modern apologist must also know when to use which apologetic tool at his disposal. Miracles are no doubt an item in that tool kit, and at the appropriate time, a wonderful powerful tool, but they must not come before it is time. One must first be convinced of objective truth, and naturalism addressed in some way, perhaps one needs to begin with the Cosmological, Teleological or Moral arguments first. Then the apologetic of the miracle can help them narrow which God is identified in these other arguments, and strengthen the knowledge of God's interaction with man.

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