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## Scientific Proof Against God

A popular objection to atheists' arguments and critiques of theism is to insist that one's preferred god cannot be disproven — indeed, that science *itself* is unable to prove that God does not exist. This position depends upon a mistaken understanding of the nature of science and how science operates. In a very real and important sense, it is possible to say that, scientifically, God does not exist — just as science is able to discount the existence of a myriad of other alleged beings.

### What Can Science Prove or Disprove?

To understand why "God does not exist" can be a legitimate scientific statement, it's important to understand what the statement means in the context of science. When a scientist says "God does not exist," they mean something similar to when they say "aether does not exist," "psychic powers do not exist," or "life does not exist on the moon."

All such statements are casual short-hand for a more elaborate and technical statement: "this alleged entity has no place in any scientific equations, plays no role in any scientific explanations, cannot be used to predict any events, does not describe any thing or force that has yet been detected, and there are no models of the universe in which its presence is either required, productive, or useful."

What should be most obvious about the more technically accurate statement is that it isn't absolute. It does not deny for all time any possible existence of the entity or force in question; instead, it's a provisional statement denying the existence of any relevance or reality to the entity or force based on what we currently know. Religious theists may be quick to seize upon this and insist that it demonstrates that science cannot "prove" that God does not exist, but that requires far too strict of a standard for what it means to "prove" something scientifically.

### Scientific Proof Against God

In *God: The Failed Hypothesis — How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist*, Victor J. Stenger offers this scientific argument against the existence of God:

1. Hypothesize a God who plays an important role in the universe.
2. Assume that God has specific attributes that should provide objective evidence for his existence.
3. Look for such evidence with an open mind.

4. If such evidence is found, conclude that God may exist.
5. If such objective evidence is not found, conclude beyond a reasonable doubt that a God with these properties does not exist.

This is basically how science would disprove the existence of any alleged entity and is modified form of the argument from a lack-of-evidence: God, as defined, should produce evidence of some sort; if we fail to find that evidence, God cannot exist as defined. The modification limits the sort of evidence to that which can be predicted and tested via the scientific method.

### **Certainty & Doubt in Science**

Nothing in science is proven or disproven beyond a shadow of any possible doubt. In science, everything is provisional. Being provisional is not a weakness or a sign that a conclusion is weak. Being provisional is a smart, pragmatic tactic because we can never be sure what we'll come across when we round the next corner. This lack of absolute certainty is a window through which many religious theists try to slip their god, but that's not a valid move.

In theory, it may be possible that someday we will come across new information requiring or benefiting from some sort of "god" hypothesis in order to better make sense of the way things are. If the evidence described in the above argument were found, for example, that would justify a rational belief in the existence of the sort of god under consideration. It wouldn't prove the existence of such a god beyond all doubt, though, because belief would still have to be provisional.

By the same token, though, it may be possible that the same could be true of an infinite number of other hypothetical beings, forces, or other things which we might invent. The mere possibility of existing is one that applies to any and every possible god, but religious theists only try to use it for whatever god *they* happen to personally favor. The possibility for needing a "god" hypothesis applies equally as well to Zeus and Odin as it does to the Christian god; it applies equally well to evil or disinterested gods as it does to good gods. Thus even if we limit our consideration to the possibility of a god, ignoring every other random hypothesis, there's still no good reason to pick out any one god for favorable consideration.

### **What Does "God Exists" Mean?**

What does it mean to exist? What would it mean if "God exists" were a meaningful proposition? For such a proposition to mean anything at all, it would have to entail that whatever "God" is, it must have some impact on the universe. In order for us to say that there is an impact on the universe, then there must be measurable and testable events

which would best or only be explained by whatever this "God" is we are hypothesizing. Believers must be able to present a model of the universe in which some god is "either required, productive, or useful."

This is obviously not the case. Many believers work hard trying to find a way to introduce their god into scientific explanations, but none have succeeded. No believer has been able to demonstrate, or even strongly suggest, that there are any events in the universe which requires some alleged "god" to explain. Instead, these constantly failing attempts end up reinforcing the impression that there is no "there" there — nothing for "gods" to do, no role for them to play, and no reason to give them a second thought. It's technically true that the constant failures don't mean that no one will ever succeed, but it's even more true that in every other situation where such failures are so consistent, we don't acknowledge any reasonable, rational, or serious reason to bother believing.

## Evil Conflicts with the Existence of God: God Doesn't Care or God Doesn't Exist

One of the most popular and perhaps most effective arguments against both the existence of gods and believing in gods is known as the "Argument from Evil." It's a popular argument because it's not one which requires a great deal of sophistication or philosophical education to understand. It's effective because even the weakest forms of the argument make a strong case that gods, or at least any beings that look very much like the gods people tend to believe in, probably don't exist.

Many people who end up as atheists are inspired to take a much harder look at their religion and their theism after being forced to face the problem of evil and suffering in the world. Thus, even if the argument doesn't disprove gods, it starts people down the road of questioning and skepticism.

### Logical and Deductive Arguments from Evil

The earliest formulation of the Argument from Evil comes from the Greek philosopher Epicurus, writing in the early 3rd century BCE:

Either God wants to abolish evil and cannot,  
or he can but does not want to,  
or he cannot and does not want to,  
or lastly he can and wants to.

If he wants to remove evil, and cannot,  
he is not omnipotent;  
If he can, but does not want to,  
he is not benevolent;  
If he neither can nor wants to,  
he is neither omnipotent nor benevolent;  
But if God can abolish evil and wants to,  
how does evil exist?

This is a logical or deductive Argument from Evil because it attempts to show that the existence of God is logically incompatible with the existence of evil. There are many variations on this but there is also another category called the evidential or inductive Argument from Evil. Arguments of this type merely try to demonstrate that the existence of God is highly unlikely given the existence of amount of evil in the world.

Logical or deductive forms of the Argument from Evil are both the strongest and the weakest, depending on how you look at them. They are the strongest because they can decisively disprove the existence of God; they are the weakest because God has to be defined very narrowly and specifically in order for the argument to get anywhere. These forms of the argument disprove a particular sort of god, but not many others. Obviously the existence of a malevolent or weak god wouldn't be disproved here. The existence of the ancient Norse or Egyptian gods also wouldn't be disproved by this argument.

### **Evidential and Inductive Arguments from Evil**

Evidential or inductive forms of the Argument from Evil don't try to show that the existence of gods is impossible, just improbable. This means that even if you accept the argument, you aren't forced to reject the existence of any gods; you are, however, forced to regard the existence of gods as highly unlikely, and therefore probably not worth believing in.

Such an argument might, for example, argue that a sufficiently benevolent and powerful being that warrants the label "god" would be able to at least reduce the amount of suffering in world — not eliminate it entirely, just reduce it. Therefore, the existence of any unjustified and unnecessary suffering indicates that such a being probably doesn't exist. Such forms of the Argument from Evil don't generally justify denying the existence of gods, but it does justify rejecting belief in the existence of gods and being an atheist.

### **Theodicies: Responding to the Argument from Evil**

Theists recognize that arguments from Evil are among the most powerful atheological arguments that can be offered, both from a logical and an intuitive perspective, so significant effort is invested in countering them. Responses to such arguments are called "theodicies," or a vindication of the justness and holiness of God in the face of evil.

Theodicies in response to deductive forms of the Argument from Evil try to show that the existence of evil in the world is not logically incompatible with God's love and power. Common means for doing this are to argue that evil is necessary for the existence of free will, virtues, and other qualities we humans need. Theodicies in response to inductive forms of the Argument from Evil may have to argue that each instance of suffering is indeed justified and necessary — not an easy task because even a single unjustified instance of suffering is potentially enough to render the existence of a god too unlikely to bother with.

## No Reason to Believe in Gods: Without Good Reasons, Belief is Impossible

Perhaps the most basic reason for not believing in any gods is the absence of good reasons for doing so. Since the burden of support (or proof, depending on the nature of the claim) lies first and foremost with those making the positive assertion — the theistic, religious believers who say their god exists — non-believers don't need reasons not to believe. They may help, but they aren't particularly necessary. Instead, what is required are reasons to believe.

This is not to say that there aren't any good reasons not to believe; on the contrary, there are many arguments which cast enough doubt on the claims of religious theists to easily justify either not believing, or questioning — and eventually leaving — whatever theistic and religious beliefs a person might have had in the past. Most of those reasons, though, assume the premise that there is some reasonable basis for at least considering belief in the first place. They also tend to assume some particular religion and some particular god or gods, excluding all others from consideration for the sake of argument.

Once a person gets beyond the bias in favor of belief, though, they may realize something critical: the burden of support lies with those claiming that belief is rational and/or necessary. Believers fail to meet this burden and thus fail to provide good reasons to accept their claims. As a consequence, those who don't already believe and/or who are not biased in favor of belief aren't given a reason to start. Those who are not biased in favor of some particular religion or some particular god aren't given a reason for favoritism and don't have a reason to pick just one of them for belief, excluding all others.

The question "Why don't you believe?" is a request for justification from the nonbeliever; the response "I haven't seen any good reason to bother believing" returns the need for justification back where it belongs: with the believer. Too often, believers fail to realize that their position is the one needing defense and this response may help them understand that. If they can't offer any good reasons for singling out their religion and their god for belief, dismissing all others as false, then they shouldn't expect nonbelievers to provide any arguments for why this one religion and this form of theism are not accepted.

Theists should think of a god they don't believe in and ask why they don't believe in it. Some may answer that their religion teaches them not to. Others, however, will respond in a way similar to the above — they have no reason to bother and/or they have good reasons to think that that god does not or cannot exist. Well, atheists don't believe for the same sorts of reasons. This helps reveal the fact that theists and atheists aren't always as far apart as they sometimes imagine. Most theists are monotheists, which means that they reject all of the tens of thousands of alleged gods except one; atheists simply don't make an exception for that last one.

The larger and more important difference between atheists and theists is probably the methodology used to arrive at these conclusions. Why does the theist disbelieve in all other gods except for the one or few in their belief system? Why does the atheist, skeptic, or freethinker not make an exception for just one god out of the tens of thousands which humans throughout history have believed in? It's not what atheists and theists do or do not believe in which should receive the most attention, but the reasons why they do or do not believe in things.

Once we have a decent idea of the different methodologies people use for forming beliefs and opinions, we should then ask which methodology seems like the best general tactic for arriving at truth. What I mean is, we should ask which method will do the best job of helping us sift through the myriad of claims we face every day, discarding more false beliefs than true one and allowing us to accept more true beliefs than false ones. For example, would you use the method in question as a sound basis for deciding whether to buy one house versus another? Would you use it for deciding whether to buy a used car? Would you use it when evaluating the claims made by a politician who wants your vote — or even better, would you use it to evaluate the claims made by a prominent, national politician who belongs to a party other than your own?

These are important questions because they will reveal if one approaches the question of whether any gods exist and whether any religions are true with the same basic standards they use when approaching other claims in life. It is my experience that few people are so consistent, and they often apply far lower standards of evidence and logic to theistic and religious claims they grew up with than they do to anything else. Put simply, they know better than to apply such standards to buying used cars and to believing politicians, but for some reason "knowing better" doesn't get translated into areas like religion.

## Life is Material, not Supernatural: We Are Material, Natural Beings

Nearly every religion posits some sort of hidden, immaterial realm which exists behind the visible, physical, and material realm in which we live. Often we are supposed to be partaking in this immaterial realm because who we "really" are is defined by an immaterial, immortal soul. This immaterial realm is also treated as being higher and more important than the material one because it's the realm in which gods live and which we are destined to inhabit after our physical bodies die.

However important these beliefs may be to religious theists, there isn't any solid, verifiable evidence that even suggests any of it is true. On the contrary, everything we do know and everything we continue learn points to the conclusion that all of those claims are completely false, and instead that the following are true: life is material and natural, we don't have anything like an immaterial or immortal soul, and an immaterial, disembodied "mind" like gods are supposed to have just isn't possible. When all available evidence points away from a particular position, that doesn't necessarily mean that it's false, but it is unreasonable to believe it.

The evidence against the claim that our minds are really immaterial and not a product of our physical brains is unequivocal. When a person's brain is stimulated, through physical implements, drugs, or magnetic fields, and put in a particular physical state, then a person's mental experience corresponds to what we know about that state. Approaching from the other direction, self-reports about particular mental experiences correspond to evidence about their brains' particular physical states. There is no reason for this to be true if our minds and mental experiences are independent of our brains; people who continue to insist otherwise offer no means for testing and verifying that claim.

All of this is true to a much more extreme degree when the brain is injured through physical trauma or certain drugs. Some destroy enough of the brain to end all mental experiences entirely. Some only go far enough to destroy or at least greatly degrade particular mental experiences — like language use or particular emotions. Moreover, injuries in particular areas lead to particular changes in mental ability — injury to one portion of the brain will affect language while another won't. There is no reason for any of this to happen if our minds and mental states are independent of our brains. If an immaterial mind is what does our thinking for us, then changing the brain shouldn't produce any, or at least any significant, changes in our thinking.

All of this is also true of other animals. It's not just humans whose mental states can be mapped to particular brain states, whether through deliberate manipulation or injury. Not only is the same true in other animals, but there is a high degree of consistency when it comes to which areas of the brain correspond to what sorts of mental abilities and mental states.

Furthermore, every species studied demonstrates increasing mental abilities as they grow older and their brains grow more complex, developing more neurons and more

connections between neurons. If our mental capacity and mental states are immaterial and independent of the brain, there's no reason for any of this to be true. Moreover, people who believe in immaterial minds don't normally attribute this to non-human animals, yet they cannot explain how physical brains can produce mental capacity and mental states in other animals but not in humans.

All medical and scientific evidence we have points to our minds, our memories, and our personalities being products of our physical brains. This is no less natural and no less material than how our physical bodies produce other processes, like digestion. If this is true, it means that when our physical brains die then our minds, memories, and personalities will also die. Since these are what make up who "we" really are, then the death of our physical brains means the death of us as well — if there is any sort of immaterial soul, it's not "us." It doesn't do our thinking, it doesn't hold our memories, and it doesn't express our personalities. This makes the existence of immaterial minds or souls irrelevant at best.

These issues also impact notions about the existence of gods with disembodied minds. Since everything we know about minds, thinking, memories, and personalities requires the existence of a physical brain as a basis, it's difficult to credit the idea that a disembodied mind without a brain is even possible. Religious theists have certainly not offered any explanation for how this would even be theoretically possible, much less provide evidence for it being an actual state of affairs. It is unlikely that such a disembodied mind exists and, therefore, that a god exists.

None of this is unequivocal proof that no gods can or do exist, nor does it prove that no religions are or can be true. It does, however, provide a strong basis for doubting that some of the most fundamental claims about gods and religions are true. Although they are not logically excluded from being true, they are excluded from being very likely true. This amount of contrary evidence makes belief unreasonable.

## Faith is Unreliable & Unreasonable: Faith is Not a Source of Knowledge

It's far too common to see religious theists trying to defend their beliefs by relying on faith, claiming both that faith justifies their position and that their beliefs are based on faith. Skeptics and freethinkers are justified in regarding this as little more than a cop-out because faith isn't really any kind of standard that can be tested for reliability. Even if religious theists don't intend it in this manner, it seems that in practice "faith" is simply pulled out whenever attempted arguments based on reason and evidence fail.

There are numerous problems with trying to justify any belief, philosophy, or religion on faith. The most significant may be the fact that there is no good reason for only allowing a single religious group to use it. If one person can offer it as a defense of a religious tradition, why can't a second person use it to defend an entirely different and incompatible religious tradition? Why can't a third person use it to defend an incompatible, secular philosophy?

So now we have three people, each defending completely different and completely incompatible beliefs systems by claiming that they are justified by faith. They can't all be right, so at best only one is right while the other two are wrong (and it may be that all three are wrong). How do we determine which, if any, is correct? Can we construct some sort of Faith-o-Meter to measure which one has the True Faith? Of course not.

Do we decide based on whose faith is the strongest, assuming we can measure that? No, the strength of a belief is irrelevant to its truth or falsehood. Do we decide based on whose faith has changed their lives the most? No, that's no indication of something being true. Do we decide based on how popular their belief is? No, the popularity of a belief has no bearing on whether it's true or not.

We seem to be stuck. If three different people each make the same "faith" argument on behalf of their beliefs, we have no way to evaluate their claims to determine which is more likely correct than the others. This problem becomes more acute, at least for religious believers themselves, if we imagine that one of them is using faith to defend an especially heinous belief system — like, for example, one that teaches racism and anti-Semitism.

Claims about faith can be used to justify and defend absolutely anything on an equal — and equally unreasonable — basis. This means that faith ultimately justifies and defends absolutely nothing because after we're done with all the faith claims, we're left precisely where we were when we started: faced with a set of religions that all appear to be about equally plausible or implausible. Since our position has not changed, faith obviously added nothing to our deliberations. If faith added nothing, then it has no value when it comes to evaluating whether a religion is likely true or not.

What this means is that we need some standard independent of these religions themselves. If we're going to evaluate a group of religions, we can't rely on something internal to just one of them; instead, we must use something independent of them all:

something like the standards of reason, logic, and evidence. These standards have been amazingly successful in the realm of science for separating the theories which are likely true from those which turn out to be useless. If religions have any connection to reality, then we should be able to compare and weigh them against each other in at least a similar manner.

None of this means, of course, that no gods can or do exist or even that no religions can be or are true. The existence of gods and the truth of some religion are compatible with the truth of everything written above. What it does mean is that claims about the truth of religion or the existence of some god cannot be defended to a skeptical nonbeliever or freethinker on the basis of faith. It means that faith is not an adequate or reasonable defense of any belief or belief system which purports to have any empirical connection to the reality which we all share. Faith is also an unreliable and irrational basis for singling out one religion and claiming that it is true while all other religions, as well as any competing secular philosophies, are false.

## Gods & Theists Behave Immorally: How Can Moral Gods Behave Immorally?

One frequent defense made on behalf of religion and theism is the claim that they are necessary for morality. This claim takes a variety of forms: people wouldn't behave morally if it weren't for religion or fear of gods, some god or gods are the authors of morality so we can't be moral without following their commands, religion and gods provide reasons to be moral, the absence of religion or gods encourages immorality, a moral person is simply assumed to be religious, and so forth.

Whatever the form, though, the principle is the same: religion generally, or some religion in particular, is equated with morality to the extent where they can't be separated. Sometimes this will be offered as a pragmatic reason for adopting that religion by arguing that even if the religion seems implausible, it's still useful by promoting morality, and this should be encouraged broadly in as many people as possible.

While these claims may be intuitively appealing to many religious theists, just how well-founded is the belief? One means for testing it is to look at the religions themselves. Are their gods moral? Are highly-regarded believers from the past or religious figures in scriptures moral? Are believers today especially moral? The answer to all of this is overwhelmingly negative, and this creates a reason to doubt both the claims about religion being necessary for morality as well as the fundamental truth claims made on behalf of the religion generally and theistic claims in particular.

The gods people have believed in certainly have not been especially moral in their behavior. This was abundantly true in ancient polytheistic religious traditions, such as the Greek and Roman gods, but at least no one made grandiose claims on behalf of their gods' morality. Not a great deal has changed, though, with modern gods. Christians, Jews, and Muslims all believe in a god which their own scriptures describe as having been the cause of tremendous suffering and evil — things which, if any human did, would cause that person to be reviled as the most evil person in history. Many of these acts are carried out by figures in religious scriptures, making them just as culpable as the deity who gives the orders.

One example would be all the killings which the Jewish god orders throughout the Old Testament — pretty standard stuff for that time period, but not exactly appropriate for a perfectly good and just deity. Another example would be the very principle of salvation behind Christianity: people who deserve some sort of punishment are let off the hook by punishing a completely innocent individual, and if people don't accept this then they are destined for an eternity of torment regardless of the scope or seriousness of their misdeeds. Neither side of that equation is the least bit moral.

Because it's a god that's involved, however, the actions are suddenly defended as just or righteous. No independent standards of morality are used here; instead, who the actor is becomes the determining factor. This sort of attitude has, I think, made it easier for believers throughout history to rationalize their own immoral behavior. Wherever we look, we can find people insisting that because they are acting on behalf of their god or their religion, their immorality suddenly becomes morally righteous. Augustine defended torturing heretics because "many have found advantage...in being first compelled by fear or pain, so that they might afterwards be influenced by teaching..."

Fortunately today, many if not most religious believers have gotten better. People who, like Abraham, claim that their god has ordered them to kill their children are treated as insane rather than as models of perfect faith to praise. No one seems to recognize the problems this switch creates for their religion, but it's still a step in the right direction. Those who, like Augustine, seek to argue that people with the wrong beliefs should be tortured and perhaps killed will likely end up in jail as criminals rather than leaders of their religion.

This does not mean, however, that religious believers today have gone far enough. They still continue to believe or do immoral things, often justifying their immorality on the basis of what they say their religion requires. Too often, society gives such behavior a free pass, allowing people to do things on the basis of religion which wouldn't be allowed in purely secular contexts. People will, for example, deny necessary medications to their children on the basis of religious faith or teach their daughters that they must live their lives subordinate to the men in their lives.

In theory, this shouldn't matter — after all, irreligious atheists also behave immorally, sometimes justifying immoral actions on the basis of secular philosophies. So what's the big deal? The difference is, no irreligious atheists try to claim that their secular philosophy is a divinely created or even just divinely inspired system of morality. They don't deny that their morality is human and therefore quite flawed. The presence of flaws doesn't cast doubt on the origins or nature of a human-created, secular philosophy; it does cast doubt on the origins and nature of a system of morality which allegedly comes from a perfect god.

None of this proves that no gods can or do exist, nor does it prove that no religions could be or are true. It does, however, make it unreasonable to single out any one religion as true while treating all others as false. When a person claims that their religion, and their religion alone, is true, comes from the one true god, and contains the one true morality created by that god, then it's hard to treat them as credible when their religious system is invested with so much obvious and rationalized immorality.

## Gods are Similar to Believers physically, in temperament, and/or attitude: Therefore Gods a Created in the Image of Humans

One of the oldest objections to popular religious beliefs and popular forms of theism is something that should be obvious, but which is too often ignored: the gods people believe in look remarkably and disturbingly like the theists who are promoting their beliefs. Sometimes these similarities have been physical in nature, but more often they are matters of philosophy, temperament, and/or attitude. Generous people believe in a generous god, harsh people believe in a harsh god, tolerant people believe in a tolerant god, and so forth.

The first recorded example we have of this line of thinking comes from Xenophanes of Colophon, an important Greek philosopher during the early 5th century BCE. Xenophanes didn't reject the existence of gods entirely, but he did reject the existence of gods which looked suspiciously like humans and thereby cast doubt upon gods generally:

Both Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods  
things that are shameful and a reproach among mankind:  
theft, adultery, and mutual deception.

And this he held was due to the representation of the gods in human form.

But mortals suppose that gods are born,  
wear their own clothes and have a voice and body.

The Ethiopians say that their gods are flat-nosed and black,

While the Thracians say that theirs have blue eyes and red hair.

Yet if cattle or horses or lions had hands and could draw,

And could sculpture like men, then the horses would draw their gods

Like horses, and cattle like cattle; and each they would shape

Bodies of gods in the likeness, each kind, of their own.

All that must be swept away along with the tales of Titans and Giants,

those 'figments of an earlier day' if social life is to be reformed.

Although Xenophanes' points are largely physical in nature, even at this time he includes explicit reference to matters of temperament and attitude: the ancient Greek gods could be thieves, adulterers, and liars — not unlike the ancient Greeks themselves, not to mention the rest of humanity. Although many people may think of the ancient Greeks and the ancient Greek religion as quite remote from their own, has anything really changed?

People's gods may not have flat noses or red hair so much these days, and there certainly aren't horse- and cattle-shaped gods, but the attitudes and temperaments of peoples' gods continue to be remarkably like their own. This is surely not a coincidence. The question then becomes: is people's behavior influenced or determined by what they think their god wants, or is their image of their god influenced or determined by their own personality and attitudes?

The former certainly isn't impossible, but if that's the case then how did so many different people come to believe in the existence of so many different gods wanting so many different things? That doesn't sound readily compatible with the existence of just a single god with a specific agenda and which wants particular things, even if we accept that people do a poor job at understanding what is wanted from them.

If theists really are trying to conform their personalities, attitudes, and behaviors to what they sincerely believe their god wants, then not all theists can be right. This means that most theists are clearly wrong because either their god doesn't really exist or, if it does, then it doesn't exist in the way they imagine and it doesn't want what they imagine.

The alternative is no less discomfiting to the believer, but it may be a bit more likely: people end up believing in gods with particular desires and attitudes because these mirror the believers' own desires and attitudes. In effect, people create gods in their own images. They may start from a template in a particular tradition, but if they are part of a religious tradition like Christianity which is sufficiently diverse, then it's easy to pick and choose those scriptures, teachings, and traditions which best justify what one is already looking for.

It's a form of rationalization, but likely one that happens unconsciously — basically the use of Confirmation Bias and Subjective Validation, things which happen in completely secular contexts all the time. It's not something unique to religion in any way, though its appearance in religion should be seen as especially troubling. Flaws in reasoning in a secular philosophy are to be expected because that philosophy is purely human in the first place; religion, if it's true, should be resistant to such problems.

None of this proves that no gods can or do exist and it doesn't prove that no religions are or can be true. It does, however, cast significant doubt on the truth-claims of all these religions, especially the claims made on behalf of the gods which people believe in. Although some sort of

god or gods may exist, it's difficult to credit any one claim in particular as being more credible than any other when it's clear that this alleged god shares so many qualities with the believer who's trying to convince us.

Even if we try to be generous and assume that such similarities are due to people trying to conform their own attitudes and behaviors to what they think their god wants and ignore the fact that others arrive at incompatible conclusions, we should still wonder how and why people would meet with such success. If there is a god, surely it must be radically different from us and have radically different perspectives, ideas, attitudes, goals, etc. It should be different enough that people trying to imitate it shouldn't be so successful.

What this suggests is that even in the best case scenario, there's a strong likelihood that people are still attributing at least some of their own personality and behavior traits to the god they believe in. If that's true, and if everyone is doing it, then it's unlikely that any single alleged god really does exist as claimed; furthermore, it's difficult to see how any one of them is more likely to be more true than any of the others. In that case, then we don't have a sound, rational, reasonable foundation to believe any of these claims.

## Religion & Religious Doctrines are Self-Contradictory: How Can They All Be True?

The most obvious and significant source of self-contradictions in a religion lies within the alleged characteristics of a religion's god. This is not, however, the only ground on which contradictions can be found. Religions are complex, detailed belief systems with a lot of different elements swirling about them. Given this, the existence of contradictions and related problems not only shouldn't be surprising, but should in fact be expected.

This certainly isn't unique to religion. Every complex ideology, philosophy, belief system, or world view which has sufficient age also has plenty of contradictions and related problems. These contradictions are sources of tension which can become sources of productivity and flexibility that allow the system to adapt to changing circumstances. A belief system with absolutely no contradictions is one which is probably relatively limited and inflexible, which means that it won't easily survive the passage of time or transfer into other cultures. On the other hand, if it's too open, there's a good chance that it will become completely assimilated into a larger culture and thus disappear for good.

The same is true with religion: any religion that's going to survive over the long term and become integrated into other cultures is going to have to have some contradictions within it. Thus the presence of such contradictions shouldn't be a surprise when we are dealing with old religions that have developed in the context of multiple cultures. Different cultures will contribute different elements and, in the long run, some of these will likely conflict. So, from the perspective of helping a religion to survive, this should not only not be a problem, but it should be treated as a positive benefit.

There's just one problem: religions aren't supposed to be human-made belief systems with flaws like this, however advantageous they may be from a pragmatic standpoint. Religions are usually supposed to have been created by gods, at least on some level, and this greatly reduces the scope for acceptable errors. Gods, after all, aren't normally considered fallible in any way. If it is perfect, then any religion constructed around this god and by this god should also be perfect — even if a few minor errors in practice creep in through human adherents.

Contradictions in a human belief system aren't necessarily grounds to dismiss that belief system because those contradictions aren't unexpected. They also provide a potential means through which we can contribute to the system and leave our own mark on it. Contradictions in religions, however, are another matter. If some particular god exists, and this god is perfect, and a religion is created around it, then it shouldn't have significant contradictions. The presence of such contradictions indicates that there is an error in one of those steps: the religion isn't created around that god, or isn't created by that god, or that god isn't perfect, or that god simply doesn't exist. One way or the other, though, the religion itself as held by its adherents isn't "true" as it stands.

None of this means that no gods can possibly exist or that no religions might possibly be true. A god might logically exist even given the truth of everything above. What it does mean, however, is that the contradictory religions we have before us are unlikely to be true, and surely aren't true as they currently stand. Something about such a religion must be wrong, and possibly many things. Therefore, it's not reasonable or rational to join them as-is.

## Gods' Contradictory Characteristics: Making God Impossible to Exist

If theists are going to have any chance to get a skeptical, critical atheist to suddenly believe in some god, the first step must obviously be to have a coherent, understandable definition of the subject being debated. What is this "god" thing? When people use the word "god," what exactly are they trying to refer to "out there"? Without a coherent, understandable definition it will be impossible to discuss the matter in a substantive and sensible manner. We have to know what we are talking about before we can get anywhere in our conversation.

This, however, is a very difficult task for theists. It's not that they are lacking in labels and characteristics to attribute to their gods, it's just that so many of these characteristics contradict each other. To put it simply, not all of these characteristics can be true because one cancels out the other out or a combination of two (or more) leads to a logically impossible situation. When this happens, the definition is no longer coherent or understandable.

Now, if this were an unusual situation, it might not be such a big problem. Humans are fallible, after all, and so we should expect people to get things wrong some times. A few bad definitions could thus be dismissed as another example of people having trouble getting a difficult concept exactly right. It probably wouldn't be a good reason to dismiss the subject entirely.

The reality, however, is that this is not an unusual situation. Particularly with Christianity, the religion which most atheists in the West have to contend with, contradictory characteristics and incoherent definitions are the rule. They are so common, in fact, that it's a real surprise when anything like a straightforward and coherent definition shows up. Even a "less bad" definition is a welcome change of pace, given how many really bad definitions or explanations there are.

This shouldn't be a surprise when we are dealing with old religions that have developed in the context of multiple cultures. Christianity, for example, draws from both ancient Hebrew religion and ancient Greek philosophy to describe its god. Those two traditions are not really compatible and they are what generate the most contradictions in Christian theology.

Theists certainly recognize that there are problems, as demonstrated by the lengths to which they can go to smooth over the contradictions. If they didn't accept that these contradictions existed or were problematic, they wouldn't bother. To pick just one example of how far apologists will go, it's common to treat some of the "omni" characteristics (omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence) as if they weren't really "omni" at all. Thus omnipotence, which is supposed to be "all-powerful," or the ability to do anything, is weakened to something like "the ability to do anything within its nature."

Even if we set this aside, we are faced with further contradictions: not within a single definition, but between different definitions from different theists. Even adherents of the exact same religious tradition, like Christianity, will define their god in radically different ways. One Christian will define the Christian god as being so all-powerful that free will is nonexistent — who we are

and what we do is entirely up to God (strict Calvinism) — while another Christian will define the Christian god as not all-powerful and who, in fact, is learning and developing alongside us (Process Theology). They can't both be right.

When we move beyond a single religious tradition and expand to related religions, like Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, the differences grow exponentially. Muslims define their god as being so "other" and so unlike humanity that any attribution of human characteristics to this god is blasphemous. Christians, who ostensibly believe in the "same god," define their god with a multitude of anthropomorphic characteristics — even to the point where they think their god became incarnate as a human being at one point in time. They can't both be right.

Where does that leave us? Well, it doesn't prove that any of these religions or religious beliefs are definitely false. It also doesn't prove that no gods can or do exist. The existence of some sort of god and the truth of some religion is compatible with all of the things I describe above. As I noted, humans are fallible and it's not impossible that they have repeatedly and consistently failed to describe some god that exists (and is perhaps getting annoyed at the situation). The problem is that the gods with contradictory characteristics aren't the ones that can exist. If some god exists, it's not the one being described there.

Furthermore, among the religions and traditions with contradictory gods, not all of them can be right. At most, only one can be right and only of set of characteristics can be the true characteristics of a true god — at most. It is just as likely (and perhaps more so) that none are right and some other god with an entirely different set of characteristics exists. Or it may be that multiple gods with different characteristics exist.

Given all of this, do we have any good, sound, rational reasons to believe in any of these gods which theists keep promoting? No. Although these situations don't logically exclude the possibility of some sort of god, they make it impossible to rationally assent to these truth claims. It's not rational to believe in something with logically contradictory characteristics. It's not rational to believe in something defined one way when the allegedly same thing is defined in a contradictory manner by someone else down the street (why not join them instead?).

The most rational and sensible position is to simply withhold belief and remain an atheist. The existence of a god hasn't been demonstrated to be so important that we should try to believe absent sound empirical reasons. Even if the existence of god is really important, that's not a reason to reduce our standards; if anything, that's a reason to demand higher standards of evidence and logic. If we are being given arguments and evidence we wouldn't accept as justification to buy a house or a used car, we definitely shouldn't accept it as justification for adopting a religion.

## Too Many Gods, Too Many Religions: All Can't Be True, But All Can Be False

Most people are surely at least dimly aware of how much diversity there is and has been in human religions throughout our history and all around the world. I'm not sure, however, if everyone fully appreciates all the implications which this diversity can have for the religious beliefs which they so devoutly and fervently hold to. Do they realize, for example, that others have held to their religious beliefs just as devoutly and just as fervently?

One problem may be that so much religious diversity lies in the past rather than the present. Religions of the distant past, however, tend to be labeled "mythology" rather than religion and are thus dismissed. To get an idea of what that label connotes to people today, gauge their reaction when you describe Christian, Jewish, and Muslim beliefs as "mythology." Technically that's an accurate description, but for so many people "myth" is a synonym for "false," and thus react defensively when their religious beliefs are labeled myths.

This, then, gives us a good idea about what they think of Norse, Egyptian, Roman, Greek, and other mythologies: their very label is a synonym for "false" and so we can't expect them to give those beliefs any serious consideration. The fact is, though, that adherents of these belief systems did treat them seriously. We can describe them as religions, though to be fair they were so all-encompassing that they could go well beyond religion and become the entire way that people lived.

Of course people took their beliefs seriously. Of course people treated these beliefs as being just as "true" as modern adherents of religions like Christianity (which means that some would perceive the stories as more symbolic while others would take them more literally). Were these people wrong? Were their beliefs wrong? Hardly anyone today believes them, which means just about everyone thinks that they were empirically incorrect. Yet at the same time, they are utterly convinced of the truth of their own religion.

If it seems unfair to compare Christianity to Greek mythology, we can make a more general comparison: monotheism to polytheism. It may be that most people who ever lived were polytheists or animists of some sort, not monotheists. Were they really all wrong? What makes monotheism more likely to be true than polytheism or animism?

Obviously there are many comparisons we can make with contemporary religions: Jews are no less devout than Christians; Christians are no less devout than Muslims; and adherents of these Middle Eastern religions are no more or less devout than adherents of Asian religions, such as Hindus and Buddhists. They are all just as convinced of their religions as the others. It's common to hear similar arguments from them all for the "truth" and "validity" of their religions.

We can't credit any of these religions, past or present, as being more credible than the others simply because of the faith of the adherents. We can't rely on adherents' willingness to die for their faith. We can't rely on claimed changes in people's lives or the good works they do on account of their religion. None of them have arguments which are unequivocally superior to any other. None have supporting empirical evidence which is stronger than any other (and any religion which insists on the need for "faith" has no business trying to make itself out to be superior on the basis of empirical evidence anyway).

So there is nothing internal to these religions or to their believers which allows us to pick any out as superior. That means we need some independent standard which allows us to pick one, just as we use independent standards for picking a safer car or more effective political policy. Unfortunately, there aren't any standards of comparison which demonstrate that any religions are superior or more likely to be true than any others.

Where does that leave us? Well, it doesn't prove that any of these religions or religious beliefs are definitely false. What it does is tell us two things, both of which are very important. First, it means that many common claims on behalf of religions are irrelevant when it comes to evaluating how likely a religion is to be true. The strength of an adherent's faith and how willing people in the past were to die for a religion just doesn't matter when it comes to the question of whether a religion is likely true or reasonable to believe as true.

Second, when we look at the great diversity of religions we should notice that they are all incompatible. To put it simply: they can't all be true, but they can all be false. Some try to get around this by saying that they all teach "higher truths" that are compatible, but this is a cop-out because adherents of these religions don't follow simply these alleged "higher truths," they follow the empirical claims being made. Those empirical claims of all these religions can't all be true. They can, however, all be false.

Given all this, is there any good, sound, rational, reasonable basis for singling just one interpretation of one set of traditions from one of these religions which should be treated as true while all the others are treated as false? No. It's not logically impossible that one interpretation of one tradition from one religion might really be true after all, but the great diversity of beliefs means that anyone who claims this will have to demonstrate that their chosen religion is unequivocally more likely to be true and is more credible than all the others. That won't be easy to do.

## The Universe Does Not Require Gods

The concept of 'god' can mean many different things - or perhaps it can mean anything, given the apparent limitless number of characteristics which various believers assign to their gods. Any time someone asks you why you don't believe in any gods, make sure you ask them what they mean by 'god' in the first place. Chances are, it's simply not something which requires belief.

In *Conversations with Carl Sagan*, edited by Tom Head, Carl Sagan says in an interview published in the *U.S. Catholic* in 1981:

When people ask me after one of my lectures, “Do you believe in God?” I frequently reply by asking what the questioner means by “God.” The term means a lot of different things in a lot of different religions. For some, it’s an outsized, light-skinned male with a long white beard, sitting on a throne somewhere up there in the sky, busily tallying the fall of every sparrow. To others — for example, Baruch Spinoza, and Albert Einstein — God is essentially the sum total of the physical laws which describe the universe. I can’t imagine anyone denying the existence of the laws of nature, but I don’t know of any compelling evidence for the old man in the sky.

In the cosmic context, the very scale of the universe — more than one hundred billion galaxies, each containing more than one hundred billion stars — speaks to us of the inconsequentiality of human events. We see a universe simultaneously very beautiful and very violent. We see a universe that does not exclude a traditional Western or Eastern god, but that does not require either.

The contrast here between the laws of nature and gods is very instructive. People might have legitimately different views on just what the laws of nature are and how they operate, but when you get right down to it no one denies that there are laws of nature and there is very little disagreement on what the basic laws of nature are.

People don’t deny the existence of gravity, for example. Why not? There is just too much that happens every day for which gravity is the most obvious and best explanation. It doesn’t make sense to say that we fall when we trip because invisible fairies push us, or a pencil falls when we drop it because invisible fairies are pushing on it — that if the fairies didn’t exist, we and our pencils would never hit the ground. Some common force is acting here on us and the pencils; gravity not only explains what happens, but allows us to predict future events with great accuracy. The fairy theory doesn’t.

We encounter a very different situation when we come to alleged gods, however, People claim the existence of all sorts of mutually exclusive deities, but they can never point to some basic, recurring aspect of the universe which absolutely compels belief in some sort of god, even if it’s not theirs. What is going on out there or around us which only makes sense in the context of some god? More importantly, what does this “god theory” predict with any accuracy, such that we can test it and discover that it’s a reliable, accurate explanation for events?

Nothing like this exists. Unequivocal evidence compels belief in something like gravity acting on us and everything around us; absolutely no evidence comes anywhere close to compelling belief on anything like a god. Perhaps the facts about the universe don't absolutely exclude the possibility of some versions of gods from existing, but there's certainly nothing about the universe which suggests that the existence of any gods is very likely.

## Immorality of the Biblical God: Can God be both Moral and Immoral?

An important objection against the existence of the god of the Bible focuses on this god's character. The god of the Bible isn't simply an ideal abstraction; in Western religious traditions we find many stories about what God has done or commanded believers to do. Often such actions are contrary to basic moral principles; at the same time, God is described as the source of morality. How can this be?

What are we to make of a god which is supposed to be morally perfect and represent a moral ideal when, at the same time, religious tradition makes this god out to be a moral monster? How can a god that commands mass slaughter and rape also be the source for morality in the universe?

These are important questions because religious theists in the West believe both the truth of the claim that God is the source of morality and of the claim that God has committed or commanded atrocious acts which people today would recoil in horror from. If these two claims are contradictory, the people are worshipping a god that cannot exist.

An argument against such a god can be formally stated thus:

1. God is morally perfect (premise)
2. Any act that God condones, commands, or causes is morally permissible or mandated (from 1)
3. Any act that God forbids is morally impermissible (from 1)
4. The Bible accurately reveals many acts condoned, commanded, or caused by God
5. In the Bible there are acts which God forbids but which God also condones, commands, or causes
6. It is incoherent for a morally perfect being to condone, command, or cause immoral acts
7. The God of the Bible is incoherent and, therefore, cannot exist.

This can be described as a contradiction between three ideas common to many Western religious systems: What God commands is moral, the Bible is accurate in its description of God's actions and commands, and there are certain acts (like rape, murder, and slavery) committed or commanded by God that are immoral.

Any of the above premises or inferences might be challenged, but not in a manner which would preserve the likely existence of the God of the Bible. Thus, even strong and effective challenges to this argument would in the end lead us to the same conclusion as the argument itself: the God of the Bible cannot or at least probably does not exist.

Either way, the theist's position should be abandoned.

## Argument from Virtue: Can a Perfect God be Virtuous?

The God traditionally believed in under philosophical theism must be all-virtuous, but certain virtues (like courage) can only be developed in the context of flawed, fallible creatures. Ergo, a perfect God cannot be all-virtuous. One or the other attribute must give way and if theists insist on ascribing both to God, then God is logically impossible.

Here's a formal statement of his argument offered by Douglas Walton offers in the book *The Impossibility of God*:

1. God is (by definition) a being than which no greater being can be thought. (premise)
2. Greatness includes greatness of virtue. (premise)
3. Therefore, God is a being than which no being could be more virtuous. (from 1, 2)
4. But virtue involves overcoming pains and dangers. (premise)
5. Indeed, a being can only be properly said to be virtuous if it can suffer pain or be destroyed. (premise)
6. A God that can suffer pain or is destructible is not one than which no greater being can be thought. (premise)
7. For you can think of a greater being, that is, one that is nonsuffering and indestructible. (premise)
8. Therefore, God does not exist. (from 3, 5)

Put more simply: If God exists, God should be more virtuous than any other being in the universe. Virtue, however, requires attributes like being able to experience pain, fear, or even destruction — attributes that God does not have. We must conclude, then, one of the following: God does not exist, God exists but is not the most virtuous being in existence, or God is the most virtuous being in existence but virtue does not require attributes like experiencing pain, fear, suffering, or destruction.

In the first two cases, the God traditionally believed in does not exist. In the last case, something very interesting in relation to the Argument from Evil occurs. Many theists attempt to refute the Argument from Evil by claiming that things like suffering, privation, destruction, etc. exist in the world because without them, we would never be able to develop important virtues like courage and charity.

These theists grant that the evil in the world is very bad, but they argue that the development of virtue is worth all that evil. These same theists also believe that God is all-virtuous — but their “perfect” God is, by their own definition, incapable of developing virtues like courage.

There are a number of possible conclusions we could draw from this, none of them very good from the theist's perspective. Perhaps we humans possess good attributes that God can't have — but that would make us better than God on certain levels. Perhaps these virtues really aren't so great after all, and thus we aren't better than God — but that would undermine the above theodicy which argues that these virtues are so wonderful they make all the evil worthwhile. Or, perhaps, God does have these virtues because God isn't perfect either — but an imperfect God wouldn't be as worthy of worship as believers claim.

However we look at it, it appears unreasonable to conclude that the God of traditional, philosophical theism can exist. If God is perfect, God cannot be virtuous; if God is virtuous, God cannot be perfect. One or the other attribute must give way and if theists insist on ascribing both to God, then God is logically impossible.

## Omnipotence and Evil: Can Evil Exist with an Omnipotent God?

Is the existence of evil compatible with the existence of an omnipotent god with the ability to desire to eliminate evil? That seems unlikely and many atheological arguments have been based upon just that. A solid argument makes the existence of the traditional God unlikely at best - and belief in it unreasonable.

Here is a formal statement of the contradiction between omnipotence and the existence of evil:

1. God is omnipotent. (premise)
2. God is perfectly good. (premise)
3. A good being always eliminates evil as far as it can. (premise)
4. There is no limit to what an omnipotent being can do. (premise)
5. An omnipotent being can eliminate evil completely. (from 4)
6. A good omnipotent thing will eliminate evil completely. (from 3 - 5)
7. The existence of a good omnipotent being is inconsistent with the existence of evil. (from 6)
8. Therefore, the existence of God is inconsistent with the existence of evil. (from 7 - 9).

Premises #1 and #2 express commonly cited attributes of God as worshipped in traditional monotheistic religions, so they seem pretty secure. If they are challenged, it would only be in order to construct a radically different concept of God which would have to be addressed separately.

Premise #3 seems unassailable. Although one might dispute exactly how far a being can eliminate evil, there is little reason to think that a being would refrain from eliminating as much evil as possible and still be "good" in any coherent sense. If we were confronted with a human being who didn't bother to stop evil even though it was well within their power to do so, it would be difficult for us to describe them as a "good" person.

The strength of premise #4 turns on how one defines "omnipotence." Does it include the ability to eliminate evil or is there some logical impediment? Some theists will rationalize away the concept of omnipotence until it doesn't accomplish much beyond what is "logically possible" and "what is consistent with God's nature," thus rendering God not much more "omnipotent" than a person is. If this line of argument isn't followed, then it would be difficult to argue that eliminating evil is outside the power of God, creator of the universe.

Statements #5 and #6 are actually quite strong — most theists will agree that #5 is true but argue that God has some very good reason for not completely eliminate evil. Some say that evil exists because of free will, others say that evil exists so that we can acquire important virtues. Such arguments and known as theodicies and do not question the logical structure of the argument above; instead, they purport to explain why #6 is not true in the case of their god even though #5 is (and, by extension, #3 and #4).

This argument demonstrates that it isn't enough to simply say that omnipotence and the existence of evil are contradictions. We need to include a number of additional premises: that good and evil are opposed to each other, that good eliminates evil whenever possible, and that omnipotence doesn't allow for any limits

## Perfect Creator: Is It Possible for a Perfect Creator to Exist?

Two qualities often attributed to God are perfection and being the ‘creator’ of the universe (if not more). Are these qualities compatible or incompatible? There are two good arguments that they are incompatible; and to the degree that they are valid, the existence of such a god is improbable at the very least, if not impossible.

### First Argument

The first argument is based on the idea that a perfect being has no need to create anything at all:

1. God is perfect. (premise)
2. God deliberately created the universe. (premise)
3. Perfection entails the lack of needs or wants. (premise)
4. Being perfect, God does not now nor ever has nor ever will have any needs or wants. (from 1, 3)
5. Deliberate creation entails an effort to satisfy some need or want. (premise)
6. Being a creator, God at one time had some need or want. (from 2, 5)
7. It is impossible to have some need or want and also to never have any need or want.
8. Conclusion: God, if it exists, is either not perfect or has not created anything. (from 4, 6)

If God is perfect, then God can’t have any needs or wants; hence, God wouldn’t bother creating something. If God deliberately creates something, it must be because of some need or want — even if it is as simple as curiosity.

### Criticisms

Theists may reject premise #3 — the idea that perfection means not having any needs or wants. One argument is that God was so full of love that it wanted to share its love with other and thus created other beings — but this example of a want does not give a reason why the premise is wrong, it simply denies it.

Another argument against premise #3 is that perfection is compatible with having needs or wants. I just don’t see any merit to this, as it goes against the basic understanding of what “perfect” means: lacking nothing essential to the whole. If God needed something, then God lacked something essential.

Perhaps God lacked nothing essential if creation merely resulted from a want of something. This might be effective, but its logical conclusion is that, as far as God is concerned, this universe is rendered trivial and unessential — even irrelevant. A child’s ant farm would have more purpose and use.

Theists might also challenge premise #5 and argue that the creation of the universe was not deliberate but instead accidental. If an accidental creation is compatible with a perfect God, this argument would render the existence of the universe even more trivial than the previous argument. Because perfection is incompatible with error, any being that can do something accidentally is unlikely to be perfect.

None of the above critiques are very effective and I would reject any claims to perfection made by or on behalf of any god that needed something or wanted something. Both signify a lack of something — one objective, the other subjective — and neither fits with any idea of real perfection which I can come up with.

## Who Made God? An Atheological Argument from Design

The question “Who made God” is commonly used to argue against the existence of the sort of god traditionally believed in by Christians, Jews, Muslims, and many other monotheists. Strictly speaking, this isn’t an independent argument because it is not offered on its own. Instead, it is used as a rebuttal to the claim that our universe is too complex and intricate not to have been designed.

According to this common theological argument, nothing so complex as the universe with all of its accompanying natural laws could possibly have occurred simply due to random chance; ergo, it must have all been designed and created by some being which believers label “god.” This can only establish the existence of a creator god, but that is usually enough of a basis for many to then proceed with further arguments to show that a creator god must be the same god of their religion.

The response “Who made God?” can be used to point out an important flaw in the above argument: if the universe is too complex not to have been designed, then God is also too complex not to have been designed. A creator-god is never portrayed as something simple or, more importantly, something simpler than the universe. If this god is at least as complex as the universe, then it needs a designer and creator at least as much as the universe.

Believers will usually respond with one of a couple of common objections. The first is to claim that this creator-god has always existed while the universe has not; because the universe began to exist at some point, it requires a creator in a way that the god does not. Unfortunately, the assertion that this god always existed is unsupported and apparently unsupportable — it’s just an assertion we have no particular reason to believe. The assertion that the universe “began” to exist is also problematic because time itself is a feature of the universe, and therefore the universe does not exist “in” time such that we can talk about a time “before the universe” or a time “after the universe.”

Another objection raised by believers is the idea that their god is a “necessary being” and doesn’t need a “creator.” Unfortunately, this is also unsupported and unsupportable. There is no basis for such an arbitrary assertion, except to try to excuse their god from the same standards they wish to apply to the universe.

Moreover, both of the above excuses made for this god can be equally work for the universe. Why can’t the universe be “necessary” or not need a “creator?” Why can’t we say that the universe has “always” existed because there is no identifiable point in time when the universe did not exist? No one can say — after all, we really don’t know enough about our universe or universes in general to make such judgments. Of course, we also don’t have enough verifiable data of gods to make such judgments about them, either.

Another possible objection, also ad hoc in nature because it is only brought up in order to explain away this argument, is the idea that the “complexity” being discussed only applies to material things. God, being immaterial, is not subject to the same standards. This objection falters, however, because the same people offering it also typically believe in immaterial souls, thus leading to the unorthodox belief of our souls existing in parallel with this god rather than being creations of this god. Although someone could hold such a belief, it isn’t one you will likely encounter; as a result, it is unlikely that this objection can be used consistently or successfully with the person’s beliefs.

The question “Who made God?” does not quite suffice to prove that the traditional God believed in by Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others does not exist. It does, however, manage to show that one of the most common and popular reasons used to support belief in such a god is highly problematic and probably cannot serve as rational grounds for belief