

So, would you ever leave your faith?

“So, would you ever leave your faith?” That’s what I was asked. It had come out that I didn’t think evolution was plausible, and that I thought God better explained the facts.

My friend asked me, “So, what if evolution were proven? Would you leave?”

“Leave what”, I asked. “Christianity, or belief in God?”

“Well, they both go together, don’t they?”

I told my friend that there were two things that were foundational to my worldview. I’ve considered the alternatives and I’m convinced that God exists, and that Jesus rose from the dead. I’ve already covered the reasons I’m convinced [Jesus actually existed](#), that [he believed himself to be God](#), and that [he rose again to vindicate that claim](#). The one under question tonight was God’s existence.

Rather than outlining the [moral argument](#), the [cosmological argument](#), or [other apologetic standards](#), I decided to take a big picture approach. I explained that the existence of a God seemed to fit best with reality. **There are many big questions in life, and God’s existence seems to address them all.** Something that happened to my car might help explain my angle.



Last summer I noticed that my car’s A/C wasn’t working. The car was difficult to steer too. Since these seemed unrelated, I wondered what on earth was going wrong. I turned down the radio and heard some horrible clunking noises. At this point, I noticed that my engine gauge read incredibly hot, so I pulled over to shut it down before anything worse happened. (Side note: I’m definitely not a car guy, so looking at the engine is something I do because I know you’re supposed to - not because I’ll be able to fix anything.)

When I opened the hood I saw oil sprayed everywhere and what remained of a

belt. Even though I was out of my depth at this point, I had an idea what all the big parts did. It seemed to me that there were a couple of options, broadly speaking. Either there was one thing that caused all this destruction, or I had just witnessed a remarkable automotive catastrophe. Either a bunch of individual components simultaneously self-destructed like some horrible mechanical symphony, or one thing started a chain of events. One initial problem seemed most plausible, but the symptoms were so unrelated that it seemed like a stretch.

After reflecting on the symptoms, a scenario began to emerge. I knew a lot of expensive things had been connected to the belt that was now in shambles. That could explain how the problem spread. Since there was an oily mess that seemed to emanate from the steering pump, that reminded me of my difficulty steering. What if that started it all? If that seized, it would probably cause the belt to slow down. If the belt slowed down, it would make sense that my A/C would suffer. Since belts don't do well with seized parts, it probably snapped pretty quickly. That would completely shut down A/C and steering and anything else connected to the belt. If the water pump stopped working, that would explain the skyrocketing engine temperature.

It looked like the steering pump was the single cause of everything else. Was that explanation certain? No, but it did seem most plausible. If not that, it seems I would have to track down what could explain a spontaneously dying A/C unit, difficult steering, an overheating engine, and several other symptoms. It seemed more plausible to me that there was one cause rather than many. Why look for a half-dozen explanations when you would do. And when diagnosing it, the mechanic should probably start by looking at simple causes rather than outrageously rare ones.

When I say I believe in God, I'm doing the same sort of thing. I believe in God because a number of questions about reality are answered solely by his existence.

- How did something come from nothing?
- Where did life come from?
- Where did consciousness come from?
- Where did morality come from?
- What about things like justice, love, and hope?

On the Christian worldview, all these questions and more can be answered in a single response: God. I'm aware that nonbelievers have answers to some of these questions, but they are not terribly persuasive to me. Besides that, they require me to accept a separate explanation for each one. I *could* accept undirected macro-evolution, inexplicable forces of nature that happen to work nicely together, a herd morality that developed on its own, and all the other naturalistic explanations. Or I could observe that an all-powerful being could easily create all those things, and he could design them to function properly together. **The naturalistic worldview requires I take on a number of new, and unusual beliefs. The theistic worldview only requires I accept one.** I realize many people think that belief in an eternal, supernatural being is a big step - and maybe it is. But I'd rather take on one foreign belief than ten. And even so, this says nothing of the questions I'd have to be content leaving unanswered as a naturalist. Where did matter, space, life, consciousness, and all the rest come from? For these, there are no naturalistic answers. Nature can't explain where nature came from. Things cannot cause themselves - we have to look to other things for explanations. To explain nature we have to look beyond nature. Something you might call "super-nature". And that sounds to me like God. An omnipotent being that exists prior to space, matter, and time could create them all. A big bang needs a big-banger. The source of all life could create more life. A conscious creator would explain our consciousness. A maximally great being could do maximally great things. One explanation. One cause. Taking on this one belief that God exists explains everything we see. I'll concede that alone doesn't mean it's true. But it does mean it is the simplest explanation, and to my thinking the most plausible.

So, to return to the question I was posed, the proving of evolution would not cause me to turn from Christianity. (I think proof of such a thing is a very tall order, though I accepted it for the sake of argument.) Evolution itself says nothing about Jesus' resurrection or God's existence. As I hope I've explained above, I am convinced that God exists. Until a better explanation can be given for reality, things like evolution seem minor and insignificant.

In the rest of life, we typically exhaust simple answers before turning to the extravagant. Why not in metaphysical questions as well? Smart people have examined the evidence and come to different conclusions. I realize that. But if you haven't pondered the issue, you would do well to consider it. **Given the shape of**

reality, what is the most plausible explanation - one cause or an infinite number of causes?

Are Hurricanes a Judgment from God?

As America recovers from yet another massive natural disaster - or “act of God,” in insurance company lingo - the inevitable question resurfaces in Christian circles: Why is God crying? What is God angry about? **What did we do?**

It’s a popular topic every time a storm hits, especially if it hits where we don’t live. Usually, the apparent target of God’s wrath is a particular situation or people group about which the person claiming clarity happens to feel very strongly (“*It’s the abortion doctor! It’s because of international policies! It’s the greedy Wall Street 1%! It’s evolution in our schools! It’s for someone with whom I am displeased!*”) There’s quite a list that gets generated in the aftermath of a disaster like Hurricane Sandy. Apparently, God has lots of options.



This is not new information. Even Jesus pointed out that the net we cast for sin gathers in quite a large catch. Jesus was once asked if a tower’s collapse in Siloam was a judgment from God on a particularly bad group of people. Jesus’ response:

“Do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? No! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” (Luke 13:4-5)

If we are trying to figure out who deserves judgment, we should start with

ourselves. Many Christians today don't cast the net as widely as Jesus did. Like those who observed the tower of Siloam fall and assumed God was not pleased with a particular target group, Frankenstorm clearly means God is seriously upset with a particular target group, right? *"Thank God it's not me!"* (said all those who lived far enough away).

This perspective blatantly ignores the perspective of Jesus. If Hurricane Sandy is for some, it's deserved by all. Ignoring that fact is bad enough, but there is a more fundamental question that needs to be addressed: **Does God use natural disasters to punish America?**

Clearly, God has used this method at times according to the Bible. The Old Testament is full of stories where God used nature to further His purposes, or to send a message of blessing or judgment. I'm not questioning this. I'm asking if God still does this today in America. I believe He does not, and I have several reasons.

First, if we have been hammered because of God's wrath, why is God so angry? Is it the election? International politics? New York City's recent decision to hand out more contraception? The cast of Jersey Shore? The lobster industry? Abortion? Homosexuality? Greedy 1%ers? Wall Street? Halloween? The New York Giants winning the playoffs? The fact that Tebow is not starting yet (he does play for the New York Jets, you know).

The Bible does not portray a God who slaps people around and then makes them guess why. The prophet Amos once wrote to the Israelites that when it comes to judgment, *"God...does nothing□ without first telling his prophets the whole story."* (Amos 3:7). **A punishment without a known reason accomplishes nothing.** Noah warned people for decades before the Flood ([and I would argue that all those impacted by the flood got the message](#)). We do not have record that Pharaoh ever said, "What was that all about?"

I'm not trying alleviate any discomfort people feel about God's reasons and ways of judgment. That's a topic for another time. For the purpose of this article, I simply want to note that [when God brought judgment to a situation in the Bible, there was a pattern](#): people were engaged in known, obvious wickedness; they received a clear, prophetic call to repentance; they were given an opportunity to escape. The book of Jonah provides a great example of how this works.

Second, if large natural disasters are national referendums, what do local storms mean? If God is angry at America right now, is He in addition mildly irritated with Traverse City? We got some wind and rain, along with a few downed trees and power outages. If a tree fell on my neighbor's house but not mine, should I read something into that? Hmmmm. Now, to figure out what it was that my neighbor did...

In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus noted, “[God] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). It's tough to use any kind of weather to gauge the character of our neighbors, be they local, national, or international.

Third, if we can use natural disasters as a means of gauging God's displeasure, why hasn't Vegas been leveled? It's Sin City; it's the poster city for pretty much everything for which Christianity grieves. On an international level, why doesn't Amsterdam (with all its decadence) or Switzerland (with all the money that passes through) get nailed? That would seem like an easy choice.

Luke 9:51-55 records this interesting window into the mindset of Jesus:

“Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, ‘Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’ But Jesus turned and rebuked them.”

I wonder what Jesus would say to us today.

(I originally posted this article at empiresandmangers.blogspot.com)

Does the Christian God exist?

On October 27, 2012, Grand Valley Secular Alliance hosted a debate on the topic: "Does the Christian God exist?"

The debate took place at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, MI.

Presenting the affirmative position, Scott Smith of TC Apologetics.

Presenting the negative position, Justin Schieber of Reasonable Doubts.

Format:

- 15 minute opening statements
- 8 minute responses
- 5 minute responses
- 2 minute closings
- Open Q&A

(For audio only, [click here](#) to listen online or download and listen offline.)

Did the Universe have a Beginning?



If you're a creationist, you presuppose the veracity of the bible.

If you're a naturalist, you presuppose the nonexistence of the supernatural.

What happens when you set aside presuppositions and merely look at the evidence? When it comes to the topic of the universe's origin, a number of models have been proposed. For simplicity's sake, they have historically fallen in two camps. Up until the middle of the twentieth century, most of humanity had assumed that the universe has always existed. It had no beginning, and quite possibly will have no end. For most in the science community, that view crumbled quickly as evidence for the Big Bang mounted.

From the first indications of the reality of the Big Bang, scientists anticipated the theological implications of a "Big Bang". **In short, "a big bang requires a big banger"**. (I don't want to get into that here - that will be the subject of future posts.) Some have undertaken to reclaim the notion of an infinite universe. They have attempted to wipe away notions of a Big Bang and explain how the universe has always been. Whether attempting to escape from the "Who did it?" question that the big bang begs, or simply following an instinct, some scientists have pressed on proposing inflation/deflation cycles, bubble universes, a multiverse, and more.

Preeminent physicist and cosmologist Dr. Alexander Vilenkin, along with colleagues Alan Guth and Arvin Borde, analyzed these models for decades until ultimately releasing the "Borde-Guth-Vilenkin Theorem" in 2003. Through their work, they were able to prove that **any universe which has, on average, been expanding throughout its history cannot be infinite in the past but must have a past space-time boundary**.

Since that time, myths have arisen that Vilenkin was misunderstood, and that in private communications he contradicted this statement. Rather than attempting to lay out the various unsubstantiated positions, I think it is better to listen to the man himself.

From the YouTube description:

Physicist and cosmologist Dr. Alexander Vilenkin refutes some scientific models

(like Eternal Inflation, Cyclic Evolution, and Static Seed (Emergent Universe)) that supposedly argue for a universe without a beginning. He then offers his own explanation (via the Borde Guth Vilenkin Theorem) why the universe did have a beginning.

From [Dr. William Lane Craig's Facebook status](#) July 8, 2012

There has been a lot of disinformation on the web about the implications of Alexander Vilenkin's work, based on out context quotations from private correspondence with Vilenkin and misunderstanding of his answers. To see and hear what the man himself holds, look at this video of his lecture at Cambridge University at a conference celebrating Hawking's 70th birthday. It's remarkably straightforward and clear. Nota bene his closing statement: "For all we know, there are no models at this time that provide a satisfactory model for a universe without a beginning."

Jesus never claimed to be God



- *How can we claim Jesus is God when he never made the statement about himself?*
- *If Jesus knew there were people calling him divine, he would roll over in his grave.*
- *Jesus would be horrified to see us viewing him as more than a teacher, let alone deity.*

This is the challenge. Jesus never claimed to be God, so why are we forcing that on the text? The fact is, it doesn't take a scholar to see who Jesus thought he was. Following are a few examples of things Jesus said and did, as well as things Jesus permitted, which constitute direct evidence of his message that he was God. **You may believe or not, but there is no doubt as to Jesus' beliefs on the matter.**

- **Jesus accepted worship** (Matthew 2:2, Matthew 14:33, Matthew 28:9, John 9:35-38)
- Jesus said he was the Christ (Matthew 24:5, Mark 5:23, Luke 21:8)

- Jesus said all power of God has been given to him (Matthew 28:18)
- He said he owned the angels and they obeyed him (Matthew 13, 16, etc.)
- Jesus claimed to speak as God - John 8:51
- **Jesus claimed to know Abraham** - John 8:56
- Jesus said “before Abraham was, I am” - Jn 8:58 (This one was not only a claim of eternity, but the phrase “I am” is a reference Jews would have understood as a claim to be God himself. See Exodus 3:14, and Isaiah 43:10 for example.)
- Other “I am” references:
 - “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12)
 - “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6)
 - “I am the only way to the Father” (John 14:6)
 - “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25)
 - “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11)
 - “I am the door” (John 10:9)
 - “I am the living bread” (John 6:51)
 - “I am the true vine” (John 15:1)
 - “I am the Alpha and Omega” (Revelation 1:7,8)
- **Jesus’ listeners clearly got the message because they said things like, “You, being a man, make yourself to be God.”** (John 10:33)
- Jesus affirmed to the high priest that he was the Christ (Matthew 26:64)
- Jesus said his father was God (Matthew 11:27, among others)
- Jesus said he cast out demons by the spirit of God, and that by him the kingdom of God had come (Matthew 12:28)
- **Jesus forgave sins** (Matthew 9:2, Mark 2:5, Luke 5:20, Luke 7:48)
- Jesus claimed to have sent prophets (Matthew 23:34)
- When speaking to Pilate, Jesus affirmed that he was a king, but not a king of this world (John 18)
- He claimed to be greater than the temple. (Matthew 12:6)
- He identified with messianic titles such as the Messiah”, the Suffering Servant, the King of the Jews, the Son of Man, and the Lord of the Sabbath.
- **Jesus blessed Peter for identifying him as the Messiah** (Matthew 16:16)
- He spoke on his own authority. (“I say unto you...”, “You have heard it said... but I say...”)
- Jesus said he fulfilled the law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17)

- He said he had the authority over the Holy Spirit (John 15:26)

**You don't have to believe that Jesus was God or that Jesus is God.
But it is certain that Jesus himself had this belief.**