

Becoming a More Confident Christian And a More Convincing Witness

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Session 2: "Questions about God"

Introduction

- A. God? The biggest question of all.
- B. The Christian claim: A personal, all-powerful, loving, eternally-existing God created the universe, including life, and is seeking to save humanity from its sinful condition by the righteousness of His incarnate Son made available through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.
- C. Alternative claims regarding God (note section V in session I handout).
1. No God exists of any sort: _____.
 2. God created the universe but left it alone: _____.
 3. God and the universe are ONE: _____.
 4. Two, equal and eternal opposing forces exist: _____.
 5. Multiple gods exist, perhaps identified with physical objects: _____.
 6. One, all-powerful God exists: _____ (cf. Judaism and Islam).
 7. Apathetic or indifferent about God or religion: _____.
 8. We cannot know about God's existence: _____.
- D. Key considerations
1. **Ontology** (cosmology): Why/How does the universe (matter/energy) exist?
 2. **Teleology**: Why/How are things "just right" for human existence?
 3. **Biology**: How did life originate in this universe?
 4. **Anthropology**: How can we explain the origin and capacities of humanity?
- E. How can we evaluate these competing claims?
1. Comprehensive
 2. Cumulative
 3. Comparative
- F. Biblical considerations (Gen 1:1; Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:18-32)

Gen 1:1 "In the beginning, God created ..."

Ps 19:1-2 "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge."²

Rom 1:20 "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

¹ The class webpage will provide additional materials, including handouts with blanks filled-in, a "Question/Answer" section, and links to helpful resources. Please feel free to submit questions and check for teacher responses.

² See my seminary sermon and slides on Ps 19 at:

<http://legacy.lincolnchristian.edu/GeneralInformation/Podcasts/Seminary.FA10.2010-11-10rknopp.mp4>.

1. No specific argument in the Bible to “PROVE” God’s existence.
2. But God’s actions in history point to His existence, His righteousness, and His love.
3. And the Bible affirms that nature points us to God.

I. **Ontology: Why/How does the universe exist?** (“ontology” < *ontos* [being])

A. Christian claims:

1. God brought the universe into existence.
2. The universe is not eternal, self-explanatory, or self-sufficient.

B. Two important cosmological arguments (*cosmos* = nature; world; universe):

1. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and his “Five Ways” to prove God’s existence.³
 - a. Assumed, for the sake of argument, that the universe was eternal.
 - b. E.g. Motion:
 - (1) Whatever moves must be moved by another.
 - (2) But the chain cannot go infinitely.
 - (3) Must be some uncaused, unmoved Mover.
2. Kalam version (*kalam* = Arabic for “speech”)⁴
 - a. Argues that the universe is not eternal but had a beginning.
 - b. Philosophical/Mathematical point:
 - (1) An “ACTUAL infinite” is not possible (though a “potential infinite” is possible).
 - (2) The universe cannot have an “actual infinite” temporal past.
 - c. Scientific point: Big Bang cosmology confirms that the universe _____.

C. Modern cosmology and the **Big Bang**.

1. 19th – early 20th century: universe widely held to be eternal by many.
2. “Big Bang” idea **surfaces**.
 - a. Einstein’s general theory of relativity (1915) implied either an expanding or contracting universe.
 - b. Georges Lemaitre (1927): Gave mathematical calculations for an expanding universe.

Sir Arthur Eddington: “Religion first became possible for a reasonable man of science in the year 1927.”

- c. Edwin Hubble
 - (1) 1924: Observed other galaxies.
 - (2) 1929: The “cosmic Doppler” effect: the universe is _____.
3. Big Bang idea is **suppressed**.
 - a. Arthur Eddington, British astrophysicist, wrote, “Philosophically, the notion of a beginning of the present order of Nature is repugnant to me.... I should like to find a genuine loophole.”
 - b. Fred Hoyle rejected the Big Bang idea primarily because the “big bang theory requires a recent origin of the Universe that openly invites the concept of creation” (*The Intelligent Universe*, p. 237).
 - c. Einstein contrived a “cosmological constant” to make the universe “static” and avoid an expanding universe. (He later admitted that this was his “biggest blunder.”)
4. Big Bang idea eventually **succeeds**.
 - a. 1965 Arno Pensias & Robert Wilson: Unexpectedly discovered “background radiation” throughout the universe.
 - b. Subsequent COBE (Cosmic Background Explorer) satellites confirm Big Bang models.

D. Impact on scientists (including atheists and skeptics).

“What we found is evidence for the birth of the universe.... It’s like looking at God” (George Smoot, COBE project leader).

³ See <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1002.htm>, *Summa Theologica*, especially Article 3.

⁴ This argument is prominently used by William Lane Craig, a leading Christian philosopher and apologist. See his website at www.reasonablefaith.org.

“It is the discovery of the century, if not of all time” (Stephen Hawking, Cambridge University).

“We have found the Holy Grail of cosmology” (Michael Turner, University of Chicago).

“For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries” (Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, p. 116).

E. **Apologetic significance** of the BIG BANG

1. The universe **BEGAN** (cf. biblical creation).⁵
2. The Naturalist’s major challenge: Began **FROM WHAT** and **HOW** (if there was “nothing”)?
3. The Naturalist’s alternatives
 - a. Oscillating universe.
 - b. Infinite universes exist.
 - c. Universe is simply “uncaused”; it just “happened”; things can come “from nothing” and for “no reason.”⁶
4. Note Paul’s degradation process in Romans I: Humans **SENSE** God; **SUPPRESS** it; **SPECULATE** alternatives; and **SUBSTITUTE** a replacement for God.

II. **Teleology: Why/How are Things “Just Right” for Human Existence?** (“teleology” < *telos* = end; purpose; design)

A. Classic teleological considerations (e.g. William Paley, 1743-1805)

1. Argument from design
2. E.g. A discovered watch in the forest.

B. The **“Anthropic” Principle** (*anthropos* = man)

1. Numerous physical constants and the ratios among them are amazingly precise to make the existence of human life possible.
2. Or, without this “fine-tuning” of these numerical values, human life could never exist.
3. The universe began _____.
4. How do we explain this?

C. **Examples** of the Anthropic Principle.⁷

1. Expansion rate of universe “must be fine-tuned to an accuracy of one part in 10^{55} ” (Hugh Ross, in Moreland’s *The Creation Hypothesis*, p. 163).
2. The ratio of proton mass to electron mass (1,836 times heavier).
3. Ratio of number of electrons to number of proton: Must be accurate to 1 part in 10^{37} power.
 - a. Hugh Ross illustration of coins to the moon (see Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos*, p. 109).
4. Strength of gravity in relation to other primary forces. (See Robin Collins in Strobel’s *Case for a Creator*, pp. 131-132.)

D. Impact on “non-creationists”

Fred Hoyle (agnostic/atheist): “A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a superintellect as monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature.”

⁵ This central idea confirms the biblical idea that the universe is not eternal. Big Bang cosmology also has significance for the age of the universe. This issue will be addressed in session 5.

⁶ Unbelievably, this is the essential position of some atheists like Alex Rosenberg (*The Atheist’s Guide to Reality* [2011]) who recently debated William Lane Craig at Purdue University. The debate is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhfkq-CM84>.

⁷ For introductory explanations, see Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator*; J.P. Moreland, ed., *The Creation Hypothesis*; Hugh Ross, *Fingerprint of God*; John Lennox, *God’s Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?*, 71-77; Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards, *The Privileged Planet* (which is also available on DVD).

Stephen Hawking: “The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers [e.g. ratio of proton to electron mass] seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life” (*A Brief History of Time*, p. 125).

Arno Penzias (Nobel in physics): “Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing, one with the very delicate balance needed to provide exactly the conditions required to permit life, and one which has an underlying (one might say ‘supernatural’) plan” (quoted in Margenau and Varghese, eds., *Cosmos, Bios, and Theos*, p. 83).

George Greenstein (Astrophysicist at Amherst College): “As we survey all the evidence, the thought insistently arises that some super-natural agency—or, rather, Agency—must be involved. Is it possible that suddenly, without intending to, we have stumbled upon scientific proof of the existence of a Supreme Being? Was it God who stepped in and so providentially crafted the cosmos for our benefit?” (*The Symbiotic Universe*, p. 27). [Note: Greenstein admits that the “theistic hypothesis” seems to be the most sensible, but he rejects it because he asserts that “God is not an explanation” (p. 28)].

Antony Flew (at age of 81 converted from atheism to theism. He had “to go where the evidence leads”):

“I think the most impressive arguments for God’s existence are those that are supported by recent scientific discoveries....” “I now believe that the universe was brought into existence by an infinite Intelligence. I believe that this universe’s intricate laws manifest what scientists have called the Mind of God” (*There is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, p. 88).

E. Biblical connections (Ps 19:1-2; Rom 1:20; Isa 45:18)

Isa 45:18 “For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited)” (NASV).

III. Biology: How Did Life Originate in this Universe?

A. Naturalism’s claim: Life arose through blind, undirected, non-intelligent natural forces and random chance.⁸

Richard Dawkins (atheist and evolutionary biologist at Oxford): “Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose” (*The Blind Watchmaker*, p. 1)

B. The origin of life requires:

1. The right **materials** (i.e., 20 amino acids).
2. The right **sequencing** of the materials to form proteins.
3. **Information** (and a communication system) to direct the process of sequencing (e.g. DNA).
4. DNA specifies the order of very complex sequences of amino acids and proteins.
5. This is “complex specified information” (CSI).

C. The Naturalists’ main challenges:

1. Dilemma: Existing information (DNA) is necessary for life; but existing life is necessary for DNA.
2. How did the information originate?
3. Purely naturalistic processes cannot generate CSI (complex specified information).

D. The wonders of the DNA molecule: A “signature” of intelligence?

1. One gram of DNA can store 700 terabytes of data (= 14,000 fifty-gigabyte Blu-ray discs!)
2. Four “bases”: A,G,C,T (3 billion pairs in humans).
3. A “triplet” of three consecutive bases gives the code for each specific amino acid to form a protein.
4. 20 different amino acids are thereby “instructed” to form proteins (from 40-27,000 amino acids for ONE protein).
5. Even “simple” organisms have many proteins (e.g. E. coli has 4,300 proteins).

⁸ This is a completely different issue from Darwin’s claims about natural selection (evolution), which I will discuss in session 5. Darwin said nothing about the *origin* of life. “Natural selection” *presupposes* the existence of biological organisms before natural selection has anything to work on.

6. Each human cell has DNA. If stretched out, a human's DNA would reach _____ BILLION miles.

E. Acknowledgment from skeptics and atheists.

1. **Francis Crick** (co-discoverer of the DNA molecule): "An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have been satisfied to get it going" (*Life Itself*, p. 88).
2. **Fred Hoyle**: "Life could not have originated here on the Earth. Nor does it look as though biological evolution can be explained from within an earthbound theory of life. Genes from outside the Earth are needed to drive the evolutionary process. This much can be consolidated by strictly scientific means, by experiment, observation and calculation" (*The Intelligent Universe*, p. 242)
 - a. Estimated the chances of life originating on earth: 1 in 10 to the _____th power!
 - b. Number of estimated atoms in the visible universe: 10 to the _____th power.
 - c. "Panspermia Hypothesis": Life came to earth from elsewhere in the universe.
3. **Richard Dawkins'** "admission": A "signature!!"

IV. Anthropology: How Can We Explain the Origin and Characteristics of Humanity?

A. Biblical creationist claims"

1. Humans created "in the image of God" (Gen 1:26-27).
2. A unique "self" not fully reducible to mere matter in motion.
3. Self-awareness and self-determination (i.e., freedom).
4. Inherent individual meaning and value.
5. A moral sense (of right/wrong).
6. A basis and obligation for universal ethical principles, including social concern and justice (Titus 3:8; Gal 6:9-10; Matt 6:1-3; Jm 2:1-9; 1 Tim 5:8).
7. Humans can sufficiently comprehend the world and have adequate knowledge of it (Gen 1:26-28).

Albert Einstein: "The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible" (*Einstein: A Biography* (1954) by Antonina Vallentin, p. 24).

8. Meaningful relationships are both possible and enjoined (e.g. family, church, community, world).

B. Competing worldviews

1. Many worldviews: There is NO "self."
2. Freedom is an illusion.
3. No ultimate basis for human meaning or value.
 - a. E.g. The Nihilists rightly recognize that, without God, nothing has value.
 - b. E.g. If Pantheists consistently applied karma and reincarnation, human value would be determined by a previous life. Why help someone if they deserve to be where they are?
4. Re: Knowledge
 - a. Naturalistic worldviews cannot justify the very use of human reason to give us "truth." (Why trust reason to give us truth if it's the mere produce of law and chance?)
 - b. Pantheistic worldviews emphasize the deceptive character of reason and our physical senses.

Conclusion

A. Criteria for evaluating competing claims

1. Comprehensive
2. Cumulative
3. Comparative

B. "Pointers" to God