



GOD OR ATHEISM: WHICH IS MORE RATIONAL?

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The conclusion that God exists doesn't require faith. Atheism requires faith.

Is it rational to believe in God? Many people think that faith and reason are opposites; that belief in God and tough-minded logical reasoning are like oil and water. They are wrong. Belief in God is far more rational than atheism. Logic can show that there is a God. If you look at the universe with common sense and an open mind, you'll find that it's full of God's fingerprints.

A good place to start is with an argument by Thomas Aquinas, the great 13th century philosopher and theologian. The argument starts with the not-very-startling observation that things move. But nothing moves for no reason. Something must cause that movement, and whatever caused that must be caused by something else, and so on. But this causal chain cannot go backwards forever. It must have a beginning. There must be an unmoved mover to begin all the motion in the universe, a first domino to start the whole chain moving, since mere matter never moves itself.

A modern objection to this argument is that some movements in quantum mechanics — radioactive decay, for example — have no discernible cause. But hang on a second. Just because scientists don't see a cause doesn't mean there isn't one. It just means science hasn't found it yet. Maybe someday they will. But then there will have to be a new cause to explain that one. And so on and so on. But science will never find the first cause. That's no knock on science. It simply means that a first cause lies outside the realm of science.

Another way to explain this argument is that everything that begins must have a cause. Nothing can come from nothing. So if there's no first cause, there can't be second causes — or anything at all. In other words, if there's no creator, there can't be a universe.

But what if the universe were infinitely old, you might ask. Well, all scientists today agree that the universe is not infinitely old — that it had a beginning, in the big bang. If the universe had a beginning, then it didn't have to exist. And things which don't have to exist must have a cause.

There's confirmation of this argument from big-bang cosmology. We now know that all matter, that is, the whole universe, came into existence some 13.7 billion years ago, and it's been expanding and cooling ever since. No scientist doubts that anymore, even though before it was scientifically proved, atheists called it "creationism in disguise". Now, add to this premise a very logical second premise, the principle of causality, that nothing begins without an adequate cause, and you get the conclusion that since there was a big bang, there must be a "big banger".

It takes faith to believe in everything coming from nothing. It takes only reason to believe in everything coming from God.

But is this "big banger" God? Why couldn't it be just another universe? Because Einstein's general theory of relativity says that all time is relative to matter, and since all matter began 13.7 billion years ago, so did all time. So there's no time before the big bang. And even if there is

time before the big bang, even if there is a multiverse, that is, many universes with many big bangs, as string theory says is mathematically possible, that too must have a beginning.

An absolute beginning is what most people mean by 'God'. Yet some atheists find the existence of an infinite number of other universes more rational than the existence of a creator. Never mind that there is no empirical evidence at all that any of these unknown universes exists, let alone a thousand or a gazillion.

How far will scientists go to avoid having to conclude that God created the universe? Here's what Stanford physicist Leonard Susskind said: "Real scientists resist the temptation to explain creation by divine intervention. We resist to the death all explanations of the world based on anything but the laws of physics." Yet the father of modern physics, Sir Isaac Newton, believed fervently in God. Was he not a real scientist? Can you believe in God and be a scientist, and not be a fraud? According to Susskind, apparently not. So who exactly are the closed-minded ones in this debate?

The conclusion that God exists doesn't require faith. Atheism requires faith. It takes faith to believe in everything coming from nothing. It takes only reason to believe in everything coming from God. I'm Peter Kreeft, professor of philosophy at Boston College, for Prager University.

Peter Kreeft. "God or Atheism — Which Is More Rational?" Prager University (June, 2013). Catholic Education Resource Center: <http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/controversy/answering-atheists/god-or-atheism-which-is-more-rational.html>.