

God-of-the-Gaps

When some people don't know or don't like a natural explanation for something, they say, "God did it." The gap that "God" fills can be physical or emotional.

However, we are never told *what* a god is or exactly *how* a god does anything. Thus "God" is not a useful answer because it provides us with *no information*.

Usually, people who believe a god exists and is providing them with answers (and other rewards) dare not displease this god. So they endow him with all good attributes and blame themselves for the problem of evil.

1) Science

The first and traditional area where god-of-the-gaps is used is science. So, for example, when humans didn't know what caused lightning, they invented a "God of Lightning." Then we discovered electricity.

In fact, god-of-the-gaps is the basis for creationism and the "Intelligent Design" movement: "This thing is so complicated that we can't figure out how it could have evolved naturally, so 'God did it.'"

2) Medicine

The human body has great healing powers of its own, which are not fully understood. Yet when someone is healed for reasons we don't understand, some people say "God did it." But if prayer and "divine intervention" were really reliable methods of healing, there would be no need for hospitals. A true miracle, like an amputated limb growing back on a human, never happens.

3) Ethics

For emotional and practical reasons, we may want there to be a system of absolute ethics. Since nature doesn't provide this, some people claim that "God did it" through "revelation."

Yet even within Christianity there is no agreement on the ethics of such things as: drinking alcohol, masturbation, pre-marital sex, contraception, abortion, divorce, the role of women, gay rights, the death penalty, and voluntary euthanasia.

4) Meaning in Life

We have an emotional desire to have a "cosmic meaning" in life. Since nature doesn't provide one, some people invent a god to give them one.

5) Emotional Security

People naturally seek emotional security during uncertain or troubled times. We've all heard the phrase "I had no where else to turn, so I turned to God."

God-belief may indeed have a placebo, calming effect, but it's the *belief* that is responsible. A god doesn't really have to exist.

6) Afterlife

Our survival instincts make us want to live forever. Nature doesn't provide for this, so some people invent a god to give them an "afterlife."

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ATHEISM 101

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Definitions

An **agnostic** is a person who has no (scientific) *knowledge* of any gods. This describes everybody. People who nevertheless *believe* in at least one god are **theists**. People who *lack a belief* in all gods are **atheists**. People who *don't care* enough to take a position are **apatheists**. Most atheists disbelieve in the existence of *anything* supernatural.

Burden of Proof

A theist makes the *positive claim* that at least one god *does exist*. Therefore, theists have the burden of proof to demonstrate the existence of a god

Atheists do not have to "disprove" the existence of gods. Atheists need only demonstrate that there is no evidence or compelling reason to believe in any gods.

Worldviews

The theistic worldview presupposes the existence of one or more supernatural beings and/or a supernatural world that precedes and supercedes the natural world. Typically, a supernatural god creates the natural world out of nothing and rules over it. This is a "top-down" view of existence.

The atheistic worldview observes the natural world and makes no leaps of faith regarding the existence of a supernatural world or beings. This is a "bottom-up" view of existence.

Six Questions

There are no verifiable answers to any of the following six questions:

1) What are gods composed of? –

What is “spirit”?

2) What are the attributes of gods? –

Stories of various gods list differing attributes: eternal vs. being born and dying; omni-present vs. confined to certain areas; all-powerful vs. limited powers; all-knowing vs. limited knowledge; all-loving vs. evil vs. temperamental vs. indifferent.

3) What mechanisms do gods use to accomplish things? –

How does a god create something from nothing? *How* does a god tinker with our DNA? “Miracles” and “magic” are not useful answers.

4) How many gods are there?

5) Where are gods located?

6) What difference does it make? – If the god that most people believe exists were to suddenly disappear, what would change in the natural world?

Six Problems

1) The Problem of Scale – If humans are the ultimate goal of a god’s creation of the universe, why did this god create *100 billion galaxies* when only a single star and a single planet were necessary? Why did *12 billion years* pass before we showed up?

2) The Problem of Silence – If a god exists who wants us to be aware of its existence, then why doesn’t it clearly reveal itself? And if the punishment for not believing is eternal hellfire, then it is cruel for this god not to convincingly reveal itself.

3) The Problem of Holy Books – If a god exists who wants us to understand him, why are his “revelations” so confusing? Why do we have so many different religions and holy books?

4) The Problem of Evil – If a god exists who is both all-powerful and all-loving, then why do natural evils, such as natural disasters, diseases, and birth defects, exist?

5) The Problem of Unintelligent Design –

If an all-powerful, all-wise god designed us and other life forms, why didn’t he do a better job? For example, why do our breathing and swallowing passages intersect so that we can choke to death on food? Why have 99% of all species that have ever existed gone extinct? (See the website: “Some More of God’s Greatest Mistakes” at tinyurl.com/BadDesign)

6) The Problem of Free Will – If a god exists who knows the future, this means humans have no free will. Yet it is often claimed that this god will judge, reward, and punish us based on our free will choices.

Nine Leaps of Faith

The god that most people believe exists requires at least nine separate leaps of faith:

- 1) Something supernatural can exist.**
- 2) A supernatural being exists.**
- 3) This being has consciousness.**
- 4) This being is eternal.**
- 5) This being created something out of nothing.**
- 6) This being can interfere with this creation through miracles.**
- 7) This being is all-knowing.**
- 8) This being is all-powerful.**
- 9) This being is all-loving.**

Meaning

There is no “cosmic meaning” to life. Evolution supplies us with drives to survive, have sex (reproduce), and care for others. To accomplish this, we acquire knowledge and live in communities. Learning and interacting with the world and others gives our lives meaning, without the need for belief in a god.

Ethics

Imagine a mother with two children, a girl and a boy. Now imagine that the girl starts hitting the boy. Does the mother reflexively say to her daughter: “Stop hitting your brother because it says not to in the [Torah/ Bible/Koran/Vedas/etc.]?” No. At that point gods and religions are not what she is thinking about.

Instead, doesn’t the mother say something like: “Stop hitting your brother; you’re hurting him!” (consequences) or “Stop hitting your brother; how would you like it if someone hit you!” (empathy)

Consequences and empathy are the bases for natural ethics. These lead to cooperation and compassion, which are found in many animals, including humans.

Science and Religion

Evidence-based science and faith-based religion are only compatible if religion either makes no testable claims, or the results of testable religious claims are not at odds with scientific findings.

For example: To say that a god created evolution is not a testable claim, though it at least accepts the evidence for evolution. To say a god created the universe 6,000 years ago is a testable claim and is false.