

## Why God and Jesus? Advent 2-2022.

Einstein famously said, 'Two things are infinite; the universe, and human stupidity. And I'm not too sure about the universe.'

One famous intellectual atheist was in debate with a Christian, and saying that there was no God. He had spoken for 15 minutes and the moderator said 'You have run over time, there is only ten minutes left for your opponent to reply.' The opponent said, 'Don't worry, I only need two minutes.'

He got up and drew a circle on a board, turned to the atheist and said, 'You regard yourself as an intelligent man with a wide knowledge of the sciences?' "Yes ", says his debater.

"OK, then how much of this circle do you think your knowledge would fill if the whole circle represented the entire embrace of human knowledge, and all there was to know?"

The atheist got up and somewhat modestly hatched off about an eighth of the circle with a felt tip. "Right then", said the Theist, "so you accept that you have no knowledge of what might exist in the other 7/8ths of this circle?" "That's right", says the atheist.

"So, is it not possible that God exists in part of the missing 7/8ths of this circle?"

The atheist had to admit that it was possible. "So", said the theist, "you are really not an

atheist, you are an agnostic, because you really don't know whether *God* exists or not."

Reluctantly, the 'atheist' turned agnostic concedes.

One of the big problems that atheists have is that they start by rejecting a premise that is necessary for their argument to hold any validity. If you deny the possibility of the supernatural from the outset, then you have already defeated your own argument as you are left nothing to argue against.

Another obstacle to the atheist is that no scientist has yet been able to define what energy is - it just is. In many ways it is like the 'Force' in Star Wars of which there was -

of course - a Dark Side. It would not be difficult to equate these with our concepts of Good and Evil.

The current cosmological theory of the origin of the universe is the Big Bang theory, which postulates that all of this energy was compressed into something infinitesimally small - less than a fraction of a fraction of a pinhead - and infinitely dense. This was coined as a 'singularity'. (Roger Penrose, a contemporary of Stephen Hawking, believes that there may have been a previous universe before the one in which we find ourselves now, and traces of which may be found in black holes - but this remains speculation.

Nevertheless, let us start with the beginning of space, time, and matter from this explosion of the Big Bang from a point of singularity.

Before that there was no time, no space, no matter. What has resulted is what we call the 'natural' world - or the universe; that which we seek to explain according to the laws of physics and astrophysics.

Taking that as a starting point, and following Hitchens, Hawking, Harris, Dawkins, and others on their desperate quest to disprove the possible existence of God, we chase the tail of who or what gave rise to or created the thing before? This is, of course, a fruitless and pointless argument, as they will, and do, end up in a quandary - which sounds like a

rather uncomfortable end in one of Edward Lear's limericks.

It is a simple case of 'reductio ad absurdum', where one repeatedly asks, 'And what came before that?' Eventually we get back to the theory that we had a singularity that exploded.

But here we come to the crux - the theist suggests that there is plenty of evidence - circumstantial, yes, - but more impressive than the opposition can mount, to allow for and substantiate a claim for the existence of God.

We claim that if God is confined within time, space, and matter - the he, she, or it is not

God - because God was - like energy - before the Big Bang, and responsible for it.

So if we say that God is outside the natural universe, or anything that we can explain - then by definition, God is 'Supernatural'; above and beyond the natural world and anything explicable by humankind.

This is what makes our atheists and others so supremely unhappy, because without denying the supernatural from the outset, they have no ammunition to come back with against the argument - because it is the only thing that makes sense.

Let's look at some of the other evidence for God, besides the origin of the universe.

Perhaps one of the most telling is what is known as the 'fine-tuning' argument. That is to say that the conditions for our planet, the earth, to be capable of supporting life as we know it, is so unlikely that it cannot have arisen by chance.

Now without losing you in cosmological theories, for those of you who would like to go deeper, I would suggest that you look into the topic of Anthropic Cosmology in Wikipedia, or read the books on the topic by John Barrow and Frank Tipler, Nick Bostrom, Brandon Carter, and Archibald Wheeler for starters - all beginning with Richard Dicke (with an 'E') in 1957. The basis of this argument is that we can only make observations about our

universe because we are here, and have the technology to do it now. This is, of course, a tautology, so doesn't get us all that far, but it opens the debates on multiverses, metallicity (carbon dependence), main sequence stars - and other amazing things. I have a list of references as long as your arm for those who wish to spend the rest of their lives investigating astrophysics.

Let me just say that the fine-tuning hypothesis makes the point that if only as few as 6 numbers of cosmological constants had been different, then the sun would have incinerated the earth, and the atmosphere would not have supported life anyway. Along with that is the fact that to date scientists

have found no other planet where the chemical composition of the planetary atmosphere would support life elsewhere. Some forms of fine-tuning arguments about the formation of life assume that only carbon-based life forms are possible, an assumption sometimes called carbon chauvinism. Conceptually, alternative biochemistry or other forms of life are possible, but nothing has been found so far.

Next let's look at the human genome. The probability of that having evolved by chance has been estimated at somewhere between  $4$  to the negative power of  $180$  to the power of  $110,000$  and  $4$  to the negative power of  $360$  to the power of  $110,000$  - in other words, a miracle. Our atheist is hooped from the

starting block because he or she can't follow the evidence where it leads - their presuppositions - nothing supernatural can occur - determine the outcome; so they effectively defeat their own argument.

And I'm only just starting now.

Those of you who wish to play the Darwin card should be very careful, as Darwin had his own doubts - read the book, 'Darwin's Doubt' by Stephen Myer, which lays bare the holes in the supposedly unbreakable tracing of evolved life backwards from complex to ever less complex forms, until we get back to the primal pond life from which we all emerged. Not so - unfortunately for Darwin and his dedicated followers, other forms of complex life have

appeared throughout the millennia with no obvious less complex antecedents. Look for the Cambrian Gap.

These escapees from the solely evolutionary argument beg the question of Intelligent Design, which even previous atheists have had to conclude now makes sense - particularly when it comes to things like consciousness, free will, intelligence, reason, objective morality - and plain logic.

If we add to this people's personal experience of what, for want of a better expression, I will call 'God Shots' of inexplicable coincidence or grace of such an unlikely nature that chance seems a limp and effete offer to make in place of a divine hand.

There are many more cosmological theories, including the virtual reality theory that assumes that we are not real at all, and just part of an immense computer game being played out by unknown forces, and that (as Sam Harris states) 'the idea of free will "cannot be mapped on to any conceivable reality" and is incoherent. Harris writes in his book, 'Free Will', that neuroscience "reveals you to be a biochemical puppet."

I hope I have done enough to convince you otherwise; if I haven't, please come and talk to me after the service and I will give you a pile of references to read.

Let us move on to Jesus.

Christopher Hitchens seems bothered by why God - that he doesn't believe in - would wait so long in the eons of human existence before revealing Jesus. Of course, that's only important if you have limited time or resources, which is not true of God - so in this context, quite irrelevant.

To support his argument, Hitchens stated that of the eons of time that life forms have appeared on earth, 99.9% of them have become extinct. He also says that about 180,000 years ago, probably due to some catastrophic global warming event in Indonesia, the population in Africa went down to between 40 and 30,000. He cites this as being so close to extinction for humanity that

it makes no sense for it to be the will of 'a being'.

William Craig counters this argument by saying that the timing is not what's important, but the population. The Population Reference Bureau says that of the 105 billion people that have existed, only 2% of this number had lived before the advent of Christ. Eric Kreps of the Survey Research Centre of the University of Michigan says that God's timing could not have been more perfect as Christ showed up just before the world's exponential population explosion (we might call it 'in the fullness of time') when the nation of Israel had been prepared, the Roman Peace (Pax Romanica) dominated the Mediterranean world, and it was

an age of literacy and learning. So the stage was set for the spread of the gospel.

This, then, is not the 'retrospective evidentialism' postulated by Hitchens but the result of deductive argument. That is to say that if the premises are true - i.e. the facts are as stated - then the argument cannot be denied on the basis of irrationality, because the conclusions follow with logical necessity from the premises. I hope that hasn't lost you.

Now I want you to be aware that I have made absolutely no reference to the bible in this sermon, quite deliberately, because I think it is imperative that we realize that our arguments for the existence of God and the

appearance of Jesus are evident without using the text of our holy book. You cannot use a thesis to prove itself.

Although next week and the week thereafter I will be using bible references, I will also show you that our history of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are attested by extra-biblical authors, many of whom were fiercely anti-Christian.

This series of sermons is not supposed to stun or bore you, but to energize you to a realization that you are not sitting on a dodgy fairy tale, and that the person of Jesus was just as real as your granny or grandpa, Queen Victoria or Gandhi.

I hope I have brought us all to a point where we can accept the evidence for God - even in the face of evil, and that God in no way negates the claims of evolution, though neither does it stick rigidly to Darwinism because of the archeological holes in his theory.

We have reached a point where we can now look at the person of Jesus in context, and see if we can find corroborative evidence to support the validity of the gospels as true eye-witness accounts of his life, death, and resurrection.

On this second Sunday of Advent, the theme is Peace; I pray these talks will bring you that peace and reassurance in Christ.