

Does God Exist?/What is God?

Objectively, I am an agnostic. I am not religious in any traditional sense, and atheists cannot disprove the existence of a god any more than believers can prove it. That is why I have a deep and lasting distaste for people like Richard Dawkins, who in using science in an unreasoning and often malicious attempt to disprove a Judeo-Christian god, show jaw-dropping theological naivety (as if the one concept of God is that of the Biblical scriptures!), ignorance of the beliefs of many great scientists and the metaphysical implications of their discoveries, and, most amusingly, blind faith that verges on fundamentalism. As much as we know about the universe and the forces that govern it, of the existence and nature of a master's hand behind it all we know, nay all we will probably ever know, is that we don't know.

Now, that's my objective position in relation to a debate and I am well aware that is not the same as a belief, which is altogether more subjective and committal, based on faith rather than certainty. The above paragraph, when discussing the existence and nature of god (which really ought to be discussed together), is nothing if not a cop out.

So, to begin: briefly, I believe in what theologians and philosophers would call Spinoza's god; that is, crudely, for comprehension of Spinoza is about as difficult for the average human brain as comprehension of god itself, god as nature and nature as god: a supreme force that lies behind all the perfectly consistent laws of the universe which science can only see but not explain. This god is the perfect symmetry of existence. It is neither malevolent nor benevolent, it does not interfere with the world or with human affairs, nor does it care about human beings, or life at all; nor can it, any more than gravity can care about a falling apple. God is not moralistic; it does not write in tablets of stone nor stand in judgment. Morals, human laws and the religions from which these derive, are entirely artificial and human in construction. (Speaking of 'natural rights', for example, makes as much sense as talking of a natural pair of trousers, no more and no less). In short, it is nothing like the god(s) of the major world religions.

Behind the infinite variety of the universe is an overarching consistency of which we can only scratch the surface, and behind this is, for want of a better term, god. Darwin, for example, often misconstrued as an atheist, rightly saw absolutely no conflict between evolution and the existence of a deity. He certainly refuted the Abrahamite religions' story of creation and, had he wished to embrace more controversy, would probably have denied the existence of a god in the Judeo-Christian sense at all; but Darwin, a man of reason and not of dogma, knew that what he was observing was the unerring, universal application of laws that seemed to govern life, not its origin. Newton, working 200 years previously, observed yet more universal laws that governed not only life, but the entire universe. What he saw in gravity and motion were the workings of an enormous, finely tuned watch mechanism; that every action creates an equal and opposite reaction was to Newton a law so universal and unerring that it could not possibly be the result of chance. Newton's only real fundamental theological debate, waged against the followers of Descartes, was how often god intervened to 'reset' his cosmological watch. (To Newton, the

idea that he had to ever refine it at all was heresy in making god distinctly less than perfect: a not very good watch maker). Another misattributed atheist, Albert Einstein entertained a different metaphor towards the same end:

We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being toward God. We see the universe marvellously arranged and obeying certain laws but only dimly understand these laws.

Einstein went further in unambiguously denying the atheism of George Bernard Shaw and others, arguing that

The fanatical atheists are like slaves who are still feeling the weight of their chains which they have thrown off after hard struggle. They are creatures who--in their grudge against traditional religion as the 'opium of the masses'-- cannot hear the music of the spheres.

Indeed, Einstein made an important theological distinction between science and religion, arguing that scientists must pursue immutable laws that govern existence and must therefore, deny any notion of the personal, interventionist deity espoused by the major organised faiths of the world. Einstein certainly classed himself as among the scientists, stressing that the very presence of universally-governing laws and complete absence of phenomena outside of these laws actually reinforced his belief in a god; if miracles really did exist, and there were no clear and fixed laws to govern life, the chaotic world of chance envisioned by modern atheists would become infinitely more appealing. The mistake of many of a rational scientific persuasion, Einstein stressed, was to confuse this conflict with the religions' ideas of a revealed, interventionist god with a fundamental conflict over the existence of any deity at all. Science, to Einstein, in its pursuit of systematic truths and all-encompassing laws actually supported the existence of a god, albeit one very different from that of the major religions.

It is the beliefs of these three great scientists, working in three different centuries over 350 years, brought together most eloquently by Benedictus Spinoza in his great work, *Ethics* that are the closest to my concept and understanding of god. Bob Dylan, singing of a very different kind of god, observed how 'in the fury of the moment, I can see the Master's hand/in every leaf that trembles, in every grain of sand'. In essence, that very much summarises my thoughts on a deity: one can observe and even begin to understand the universal laws that govern our world, but never the cosmological legislator behind them. Writing on a final and subjective note, the very order and certainty of the physical universe convinces me of the existence of a supreme, spiritual order behind it; it is not interventionist, it is not moral, it is in no way human or even sentient, but it is god.