

Chapter 2: The Father

8. The Almighty...

9. Looking

10. Proofs

11. Denial

12. Creation and Providence

13. Grace

“For people without Bibles..displays of nature transport them from the mundane to the sublime, but rarely to belief in a Divine Creator. However, once faith takes a person to the Creator, everything falls into place: morality, responsible behavior, natural law, ecology, stewardship, etc.

Is this really true?

Creator → morality?

Creator → responsible behavior?

Creator → natural law?

Creator → ecology?

Creator → stewardship?

What can we know about God?

Conceptions of God vary widely. Theologians and philosophers have studied countless conceptions of God since the dawn of civilization. The Abrahamic conceptions of God include the trinitarian view of Christians, the Kabbalistic definition of Jewish mysticism, and the Islamic concept of God. The dharmic religions differ in their view of the divine: views of God in Hinduism vary by region, sect, and caste, ranging from monotheistic to polytheistic to atheistic; the view of God in Buddhism is almost non-theist. In modern times, some more abstract concepts have been developed, such as process theology and open theism. Conceptions of God held by individual believers vary so widely that there is no clear consensus on the nature of God.

Theism and Deism

- Theism generally holds that God exists **realistically, objectively**, and **independently of human thought**; that God created and sustains everything; that God is omnipotent and eternal; personal and interacting with the universe through for example religious experience and the prayers of humans.
 - It holds that God is both transcendent and immanent; thus, God is simultaneously infinite and in some way present in the affairs of the world...
 - Most theists hold that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent, although this belief raises questions about God's responsibility for evil and suffering in the world.
 - Some theists ascribe to God a self-conscious or purposeful limiting of omnipotence, omniscience, or benevolence. Open Theism, by contrast, asserts that, due to the nature of time, God's omniscience does not mean the deity can predict the future.
- "Theism" is sometimes used to refer in general to any belief in a god or gods, i.e., monotheism or polytheism.
- Deism holds that God is wholly transcendent: God exists, but does not intervene in the world beyond what was necessary to create it.
 - In this view, God is **not anthropomorphic**, and does not literally answer prayers or cause miracles to occur.
 - Common in Deism is a belief that God has no interest in humanity and may not even be aware of humanity (**Thomas Jefferson was said to be a deist**).

Henotheism (Greek εἷς θεός heis theos "one god")

- is a term coined by Max Müller, to mean worshipping a single god while accepting the existence or possible existence of other deities. (A deity is a postulated preternatural or supernatural immortal being, who may be thought of as holy, divine, or sacred, held in high regard, and respected by believers.)
- Henotheism is based on the belief that god may take any form at any time and still have the same essential nature. The central idea is that **one name** for god may be used in a circumstance where a particular aspect of god is being represented or worshiped while a **different name** may be given to or used to describe or worship a different aspect of god in a different circumstance. This example does not imply the superiority of one over another, but simply that god can exist in many forms at once and offering worship or praise using different names does not have to imply polytheism. **Henotheism is sometimes considered a sophisticated version of monotheism** in that it allows the worshiper to believe in essentially one Supreme Being and still appreciate and not limit the names, expressions, or manifestations used to describe it.
 - Christians believe in angels, demons, and/or saints that are inferior to God. Christians do not consider these beings as gods, though they are sometimes the object of prayer and veneration. However, Christian churches which teach praying to saints insist that such prayer is only proper when limited to asking for the angel or saint's intercession to God. Gnosticism is generally henotheistic.
 - The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (colloquially known as the LDS Church or Mormon church) considers the members of the Christian Godhead as three distinct beings, where God the Father is supreme, yet all three beings are defined collectively as "God". The Church teaches the worship of one god, which belief is most easily described as worshiping God the Father through the conduit of the Son, Jesus Christ, as led by the Holy Ghost. Whereas other Christians speak of "One God in Three Persons", LDS scripture speaks instead of three persons in one god. See the Book of Mormon's Mosiah 15:4 ("they are one God"), and LDS interpretation of John 17:11[10] (Jesus asks the Father in prayer that his disciples "may be one, as we are").
 - Jehovah's Witnesses are viewed as henotheistic because they worship the god Jehovah while viewing Satan as a lesser god. Satan in particular is referred to as "god of this system of things", that is, the invisible spirit having control over governments and other institutions of the secular and religious world, a position he has held since Adam and Eve's defection in Eden, with its implicit change of allegiance from God (Jehovah) to Satan. Jesus is referenced as sitting at the right hand of God, assisting in all acts of Creation aside from his own, hence his status as "only begotten" (cf. John 1:14, 18). It should be noted that no "god" aside from Jehovah is an appropriate object of worship for Jehovah's Witnesses. Jesus alone is accepted as an intercessor between God and man, but even he is not worshiped as such.

If God is real is He empirical?

- "Empirical" refers to the use of working hypotheses that are testable using observation or experiment. In this sense of the word, scientific statements are subject to and derived from our experiences or observations. Empirical data are data that are produced by experiment or observation.
- In philosophy, empiricism is a theory of knowledge which asserts that knowledge arises from sense experience. Empiricism is one of several competing views about how we know "things," part of the branch of philosophy called epistemology, or "the Theory of Knowledge".
- The Roman Catholic Church disputed Galileo's empirical arguments because the Bible said that God created the earth and Jesus came to save it, so logically the earth **MUST** be the most important celestial body, hence the sun and all other bodies **MUST** revolve around the earth.

Scientific positions regarding God

- Stephen Jay Gould proposed an approach dividing the world of philosophy into what he called "non-overlapping magisteria" (NOMA). In this view, questions of the supernatural, such as those relating to the existence and nature of God, are non-empirical and are the proper domain of theology. The methods of science should then be used to answer any empirical question about the natural world, and theology should be used to answer questions about ultimate meaning and moral value. In this view, the perceived lack of any empirical footprint from the magisterium of the supernatural onto natural events makes science the sole player in the natural world.
- Another view, advanced by Richard Dawkins, is that the existence of God is an empirical question, on the grounds that "a universe with a god would be a completely different kind of universe from one without, and it would be a scientific difference."
- Carl Sagan argued that the doctrine of a Creator of the Universe was difficult to prove or disprove and that the only conceivable scientific discovery that could challenge it would be an infinitely old universe.

What does the concept “GOD” or “ALLAH” encompass?

- Regardless of religious tradition, there have generally been two main approaches used when attempting to define God. The first is **apophatic**, or, as known in Christianity, the "via negativa." This negative theology attempts to define God by what he is not. For example, orthodox theism says God is not limited, not finite, not created, and so forth.
- Compare this, then, with **cataphatic** thought, or the "via positiva." Positive theology is willing to make claims about what/who God actually is. For example, one might say that God is omnipotent, God is infinite, God is eternal, and so forth.

- Both traditions have longstanding historical roots. Apophatic theology has tended to be less popular, and has traditionally been the domain of mystics. More recently, the apophatic mantle has been taken up by deconstructionists. Following Jacques Derrida, theologians like Mark C. Taylor and John Caputo have pursued a "religion without religion" that ceases to make definite, absolute claims about what/who God is. They point to phrases like that of St. Anselm of Canterbury - God as "that which none greater can be conceived" - to show that whatever we say of God, he is always more, greater, beyond.
- Cataphatic theology, on the other hand, has traditionally had more mainstream followers. The Christian churches (Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox) have seen in the Incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth a divine unveiling, the unknown become known. They may join the *via negativa* to some extent, but also contend that some of God has been made understandable and knowable to humans. Expectedly, systematic theologies of all stripes have leaned in this direction.
- Both traditions also wrestle, to some degree or another, with the nature of religious language. The question is whether our talk of God is "univocal," "equivocal," or "analogical."
 - Univocal speech is that which has to a one-to-one correspondence in concept. For example, we might say that "God is love" where God's love is essentially the same (love qua love), only more/deeper/stronger/purer.
 - Equivocal language, on the other hand, would claim that our concept of "love" has no relation to God's. When we say "God is love" we must realize that this means something completely other than what we mean by human love. Naturally, negative theology has tended in this direction, thus their definitions of God as what he is not.
 - Lastly, analogical language that says that our concepts do not match exactly with God's, but are true by analogy. The analogical tradition would say that human love is incomparable to God's, but we can know/understand some of what God's love is like because of our own flawed version. Historically this has been the dominant understanding (in the Christian religion, popularized and articulated by St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas) as it strikes a middle-ground between univocal and equivocal speech.

Describe Nature, then Acts

- Can we know the essential nature of God?
 - “There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts or passion; of infinite power, wisdom and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things both visible and invisible. (Robinson and Shaw)
 - “God alone is the ultimate authority in human life and the ultimate refuge amid all the perils of historical existence.” Since God is the ground and source of life, claims of all other gods are false.
 - “God is the source of all being and knowledge, the One from whom all things derive their essence and existence. (but Augustine taught that we can learn only by grace and must believe in order that we understand).

Tillich Interprets the word *GOD*

- God is the highest being, distinct and above all other beings. This suggests God is just bigger and better than every other being.
- God is the life of the Universe. “This is naturalism which destroys the transcendence of God by confusing him with the created world. It neglects the attribute of holiness in God, for holiness puts God at a distance from his creation.”
 - If we were to try and name all the attributes of God, holiness would top the list because this attribute infiltrates all the others. For example, love is an attribute of God—but His love is a holy love. His omniscience is holy omniscience. His omnipresence is holy omnipresence.
 - Holiness fundamentally means separation from all that is common or profane or ungodly. The root word means “to separate or to cut off.” A “holy day” is separated from the other days. “Holy ground” is separated from the rest of the ground. Added to the concept of holiness is the truth that absolute holiness belongs only to God.
 - There are two basic aspects to God’s holiness. One aspect is related to the loftiness, exaltedness, and splendor of God as seen in Isaiah 6:1-4, where Isaiah saw God “high and lifted up,” and the seraphim cried “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.” The second feature of God’s holiness is the absolute purity of His goodness. God is untouched and unstained by the evil of the world. God’s holiness is the standard for our moral character, and the motivation for the way we are to live our lives.
- **God** is the symbol for the Creator-Lord of the universe. “He is the ground of all being, yet transcends everything.” We can know only his finite aspects.

What is that to me?

Most religions use the word **God** for translating their ultimate reality into English. When I use the word God in a Christian context, I must be clear about its meaning. I do this by explaining Biblical passages that describe God’s person and work, they by living out Godlike qualities—holy, loving, just, compassionate, forgiving.

Allah (God)

- It is a known fact that every language has one or more terms that are used in reference to God and sometimes to lesser deities. This is not the case with Allah. **Allah is the personal name of the One true God.** Nothing else can be called Allah. The term has no plural or gender. This shows its uniqueness when compared with the word god which can be made plural, gods, or feminine, goddess. It is interesting to notice that Allah is the personal name of God in Aramaic, the language of Jesus and a sister language of Arabic.
- The One true God is a reflection of the unique concept that Islam associates with God. To a Muslim, Allah is the Almighty, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, Who is similar to nothing and nothing is comparable to Him. The Prophet Muhammad was asked by his contemporaries about Allah; the answer came directly from God Himself in the form of a short chapter of the Quran, which is considered the essence of the unity or the motto of monotheism. This is chapter 112 which reads:
 - *"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
Say (O Muhammad) He is God the One God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, nor has been begotten, and equal to Him is not anyone."*

9. Looking

(How do we find God?)

- **Look within and admit you are ephemeral** (lasting a very short time; short-lived; transitory)
 - Schleiermacher began with man's **feeling of absolute dependence** (God accounts for the vastness of the universe)
 - Immanuel Kant postulated a moral order in the universe and a moral imperative over man...ethics, not logic, is the point of departure for knowing God (instinctive sense of conscience—"I ought"), because other ways of knowing cannot apprehend the nature of God.
- **Look outside yourself and dare to assume that the existence of God is more rational than atheism.**
 - Aquinas believed God evident in nature.
 - Barth believed ONLY in special revelation—God is known in his acts and his names (man seeking God = religion, God seeking man=Christianity).
 - In the OT God has many names:
 - "He is El, the strong and might one—Elohim, God's fullness and power.
 - He is Elyon, the high and exalted one
 - He is Adonai, the Ruler and Lord to whom everything is subject.
 - He is El shaddai, the all-sufficient One who distributed bountifully to his creation.
 - He is Yahweh, the eternally self-consistent One who enters into covenants with his people and does not change.
 - He is Sabboath, the glorious One.
 - In relation to man, God is holy, righteous, just, faithful, loving, and gracious

10. Proofs (4)

- **The cosmological argument** (Aquinas) God is the prime mover, the First Cause, the non-contingent source. This ignores God's continuing involvement with the world.
- **The teleological argument** (William Paley, intelligent design) The universe seems to be finely tuned to support human life, a fact so unlikely by chance and to suggest a Creator (designer)
- **The moral argument** “The existence of God is a necessary presupposition of the absolute claim upon us which moral obligations have. When I ought to do something, this ‘ought’ is unconditional.” Has morality evolved to support an increasingly complex society, or is morality instinctive?
- **the ontological argument** (Anselm) God is “what which no greater or more perfect can be conceived.” Tillich argues that humans have a internal absolute standard by which they judge all religious claims. They are presuming (by the failure of religions) a more perfect Absolute exists (this is not as good as it gets). From whence does this imagined Absolute come?

11. Denial

God does not exist

- Atheological arguments (arguments for the nonexistence of God) can be divided into two main groups. One group consists of arguments which aim to show an incompatibility between two of God's properties. Let us call those "incompatible-properties arguments." The other group consists of arguments which aim to show an incompatibility between God's existence and the nature of the world. They may be called "God-vs.-world arguments."
 - The first group include linguistic arguments that center on our inability to adequately define/describe God.
- Psychological arguments are not about God but the nature of man:
 - Feuerback: "God is projected personality of man"
 - Marx: "man makes religion to suit his own goals"
 - Freud: "belief in God is a projection of wishes"
- Tillich (like Barth) eschews arguments: "It is as atheistic to affirm the existence of God, as it is to deny it (existence implied non-existence).
- Many people are atheistic via indifference: "The creed of the English is that there is o God and that it is wise to pray to him from time to time"

Example of Inherent Inconsistency Argument

- God is perfect and also to be the creator of the universe. It seems that those properties might be shown to be incompatible in two different ways. The first way is as follows:
- **Version #1**
 1. If God exists, then he is perfect.
 2. If God exists, then he is the creator of the universe.
 3. A perfect being can have no needs or wants.
 4. If any being created the universe, then he must have had some need or want.
 5. Therefore, it is impossible for a perfect being to be the creator of the universe (from 3 and 4).
 6. Hence, it is impossible for God to exist (from 1, 2, and 5).
- Premise 3 might be challenged on the grounds that a perfect being, full of love, could desire to share his love with others. Thus, a perfect being could have a want, which would make premise 3 false. I suppose the only problem with this is that if a being wants something that he does not have, then he cannot be perfect, for he would be in a certain way incomplete. Whether or not this adequately defends premise 3 is hard to say. There is a certain unclarity, and perhaps subjectivity, in the idea of "perfection" which poses an obstacle to any sort of rigorous reasoning about the concept.

- **Version 2**

1. If God exists, then he is perfect.
 2. If God exists, then he is the creator of the universe.
 3. If a being is perfect, then whatever he creates must be perfect.
 4. But the universe is not perfect.
 5. Therefore, it is impossible for a perfect being to be the creator of the universe (from 3 and 4).
 6. Hence, it is impossible for God to exist (from 1, 2, and 5).
- The usual reply to this line of thought is that whatever imperfections the universe may contain, they are the fault of mankind, not God. Thus, the universe was indeed perfect when God first created it, but it later became imperfect because of the actions of humans. This could be taken as an attack on the argument's premise 3, construed to imply that what is perfect must remain so indefinitely. I shall not pursue the many twists and turns that this issue might take. It is essentially the same as what is called the "Deductive Argument from Evil," which is a topic beyond the scope of the present survey.

The Case for a Coherent God

“Disproving Various Incoherent Gods doesn’t mean a Coherent God Can’t Exist.”

By Joseph A. Sabella

Summary of Scientific and Moral Coherence

As stated earlier, this paper is not going to prove the existence of a Scientific and Morally Coherent God but it does seek to prove that such an idea can logically exist. Based on the latest science in physics, cosmology, and near-death research described earlier in the paper, the ideas of a Scientifically and Morally Coherent God can be summarized as follows:

- 1. He is an eternal, unconditionally loving, multidimensional being with vast creative powers who is able to produce or create offspring or children.
- 2. These spiritual children have the potential to develop all the spiritual powers of their creator as they grow from spiritual childhood, through adolescence and into spiritual maturity.
- 3. As part of this developmental process the spiritual adolescent enters this dimension and becomes human.
- 4. Spiritual Adolescents, by definition, are inexperienced in the use of their spiritual powers and because of this they cause and experience great physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering, in this dimension.
- 5. When their physical bodies die the spiritual adolescents return to a spiritual dimension where they review their life and learn from it.
- 6. The spiritual adolescent is then free to return to this dimension and take another physical life that will further their development to spiritual maturity.

12. Creation and Providence

- Creation—“every existing thing depends upon God for its existence (corollary of belief in God’s sovereignty)
 - Some religious conservatives argue against our specific universe with its specific characteristics happening by chance. However, it is the nature of chance that unlikely things happen. Estimating a low probability does not prove impossibility.
 - Science is currently speculating about multiple universes, so perhaps there is a universe for every possible combination of characteristics, and forms of life that could not exist in our universe just as our form could not exist in theirs.
 - The Bible tells the story of Noah as God “starting over” with humanity. What would prevent God from creating moral beings in multiple places in our universe or in other universes, some of which might fall into sin and some of which might live as God intended, in perfect fellowship with Him? Was all of the whole universe contaminated by the acts of humans on earth? Is the devil (evil) restricted to earth? Might there be other children of God who do not know about evil?
- “In a world where much is mysterious, painful and threatening, the doctrine of creation must be accepted by faith. Such faith is vindicated at the cross where God accomplished his purpose in the face of evil and death. “

What is cosmology?

- literally, “reason about the world,” —beliefs about the nature of the universe
 - Gnostics: world (matter) is evil
 - Greeks argued about ultimate reality (perfect) and our perceptions (we perceive shadows – through the glass darkly)
 - Buddhists think reality is fluid, unfolding, malleable
 - Chinese believed in unseen order and humans ought to seek to align themselves harmoniously
 - Christians: God acts on the world to create and redeem it. Therefore the physical world cannot be divine nor any part of it worshiped, and since the world is subject to God it MUST be “rational, orderly and patterned”
 - A physics professor at Calvin College noted that he did not believe that God would “lie” and create a universe that “seemed” to be old but wasn’t really. Nor would gravity work on earth and in our solar system, but not in the next galaxy (that is, if the laws of physics hold then the universe is large, if they don’t our galaxy or our solar system could be the only one and all the others we observe are just mirages, induced by some capsule that encloses us (Aristotle’s crystal spheres).
 - “Theology lives with the paradox that the world is moving according to God’s pattern, yet man is responsible for acts within it. “

- **What is that to Me?**

Since God created the world, I must be active in it. “True spirituality does not deny the world or escape from it.” I will be a faithful steward to make the world a better place (but I will obey Ceasar)

- **What is providence?**

- the “action of God by which he preserves in existence the creation which he has brought into being, and guides it to his intended purpose” (Ericson)

- “Believing in God’s providence enables us to face the future confidently, knowing that things are not happening by mere chance (good luck, bad luck)

- Does God CAUSE bad things to happen to us (for our spiritual growth)? [Job?]

- If our choices (or our ancestors’ choices) bring calamity upon us, will God make everything ok?

- Are Christians more blessed than Jews, Muslims, or atheists?

- “Theologians have distinguished God’s general providence, sustaining his creation, from his special providence, intervening in nature and history for special purposes. God’s general providence includes not only preservation but also [his] government, moving events toward an end.”

Why Pray?

- “God not only wills the end but also the means which include our prayers. We participate with him in his providence by prayer and action.”
- “The essence of prayer is not asking but offering, not self-seeking but self-dedication” ...Jesus stressed that prayer to the Father should be private, conversational, brief, frequent and intense.
- “Far better that public prayer be written out ahead of time and easy to follow than be extemporaneous and rambling (favor time-tested prayers in corporate worship). “Even when we pray alone..it is the church praying through us; my concerns are the concerns of my brother and vice-versa.”
- Does God interfere with his own laws in answering our prayers? <No.> Jesus could not work miracles in some towns because of people’s unbelief.

What are miracles?

- manifestations of unknown natural laws (not divine)
- breaking natural law to meet human need or make prophecies credible
- God superseding with another law to accomplish his purpose (overcoming death with life).

What is that to me?

Providence is sufficient; I need not seek miraculous intervention. Let God be God. He intervenes through miracles at his good pleasure.

13. Grace

- ***charis*** in Greek translates to graciousness, special empowerment, and undeserved favor (relate to Heb ***chesed*** which signified not only God’s redemptive love towards undeserving sinful men but his sustained determination to maintain that relationship to them.)
 - traces the evolution of *charis* from signifying “something which excites joy in hearers or viewers” to “a favor freely done, without claim or expectation of return.” *Eleos* (mercy) had to do with misery, pitying the miserable; *charis*, with forgiving.
 - “the resurrected and exalted Christ is considered a repository of grace for those united to him by faith
 - in the NT grace is
 - possessed as a source of blessings for the believer
 - a store that is dispensed
 - a state (standing in God’s favor) that is brought about
 - a deed wrought by God in Christ
 - a work that grows from more to more (Arndt)

- The visible responses to divine acts of grace on our behalf, such as faith, repentance, sanctification, and service, are not human-generated attitudes and actions expressing our appreciation and gratitude, but even our acceptance and responses are the result of God's grace working in us.

What is that to me?

- Grace is a fundamental property of the Triune God, flowing to me when I fail, and pervading every work he blesses. Contrast the doctrine of Karma (the law of retribution) which says I can neither fault others when I am victim, nor thank anyone when I am victor, for I am the fated captor of my soul, maker of my destiny. Merit or lack thereof determines my estate in life.
- My gratitude is demonstrated when I am gracious to others when they fail.