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Taking on Doubt about God

By Freddy Davis

It is not uncommon for me to hear people express doubts about God's existence. Interestingly, there are two groups of people who typically fall into this category.

The first are those who claim not to believe in God. Those who take this position often ask for "proof" that God exists. When asking for proof, what they really mean is that they want to see some kind of physical or empirical proof. This, of course, is impossible because God exists outside of the natural universe and is not subject to the laws of nature.

What these folks don't realize is that their own belief about God (that He doesn't exist) is also not subject to empirical inquiry. Their atheist or agnostic beliefs are also religious beliefs that they must accept by faith. I believe it is not unreasonable to make these folks justify their own faith before I allow them to question mine.

But that is not what we are looking at here. The second category of people who sometimes express doubt about the existence of God are Christians – many of whom are active in a church.

Most of the time when I hear fellow believers express doubt, they are still trying to cling to their belief – in spite of their doubt. They generally hang onto the notion that they must believe by faith and simply don't think about it much. So why do some Christians struggle with that kind of doubt?

Dealing with Doubt

The truth is, virtually all doubt, when it comes to religion, is based on ignorance. People tend to know what they *want* to believe, but have no idea how to actually articulate a justification for it.

There are two ways to approach this. The most common way Christians deal with this topic is to use a defensive apologetics approach where they receive some kind of challenge (either in their own mind [doubts] or from some challenger), and come up with a rebuttal using either Scripture or some form of logical argument. The truth is, learning Christian apologetics knowledge and skills is very important. Having positive evidence for our faith can be very valuable as a means of mitigating doubt.

But there is a second way that can be just as valuable – perhaps even more so in some situations. That second way is to understand the weaknesses of other points of view. People may have doubts about the viability of Christian beliefs, but are there other beliefs that fare any better? Is there a positive case to be made for them?

To get at this, let's look at the necessary beliefs of each of the worldview categories and see if they are able to stand up to scrutiny. We can legitimately limit our evaluation to the worldview categories since every belief system (religion, cult, or philosophy) is built on a particular worldview foundation, and any weakness in a worldview automatically applies to every belief system based upon it.

Naturalism

Naturalism is the belief that the natural universe, operating by natural laws, is all that exists. If that atheistic belief is true, then certain other things must also be true.

1. *Matter Must Have a Natural Source* - If the natural universe is all that exists, then there is no God or any other transcendent power that exists to create anything. The problem this poses for Naturalists is that there is no empirical evidence whatsoever to demonstrate that this is even possible, much less true. It is a belief based on faith in naturalistic philosophy, not on the kind of scientific evidence naturalists require of non-naturalists advocating for their beliefs. It is a religious belief.

2. *Life Must Be Able to Emerge from Non-life* - Once again, without the existence of some transcendent power, natural laws must somehow be able to account for the existence of life. Naturalists assert that prior to the existence of life, all that existed was non-living matter and energy. Somehow, this non-living material had to naturally evolve into a living form. Once again, there is no empirical evidence whatsoever to demonstrate that this is even possible, much less true. It is a belief based on faith in naturalistic philosophy, not on the kind of scientific evidence naturalists require. It is a religious belief.

3. *More Complex Life must Evolve from Less Complex Forms* - As before, without the existence of some transcendent power,

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natural laws must somehow be able to account for the variety of life forms that exist on earth. The naturalistic solution is a belief in naturalistic evolution. This is the point that Naturalists will fight about the hardest. In fact, an entire system has been created in an effort to support this belief. Believers will point to supposed scientific data published by evolutionary scientists in scientific journals and taught in virtually all secular schools and universities. The belief is that less complex life forms are able to naturally evolve to more complex forms based purely in the natural laws of the universe.

The problem is, however, that there is no actual science able to demonstrate this to be true. Virtually all supposed evidence is not based on science at all. Rather, every proposal is an attempt to use the scientific method to back up the philosophical belief that natural causes are able to account for all existing life forms. Once again, there is no actual science able to demonstrate that this is even possible, much less true. As with the previous points, it too is a religious belief based on naturalistic philosophy.

4. *Consciousness Must Emerge from Non-consciousness* - If there is no transcendent power able to generate consciousness in life forms, then the only possibility is for it to have naturally evolved based on the natural laws of the universe. Once again, however, there is no science able to demonstrate that this is even possible, much less true. As with the other necessary elements, this is a belief based on faith in naturalistic philosophy, not on the kind of scientific evidence naturalists require. It is a religious belief.

Animism

Animism is the belief that reality is divided into two parts – a spirit world and a material world – that interact with each other in a symbiotic relationship. What happens in one part affects what happens in the other. Human beings, then must act in ways that don't negatively impact the spirits in the spirit world. If they do this well, the spirits will bestow blessings, but if not they will cause problems.

While Animists believe in a transcendent reality, they don't believe that the spirits have provided any kind of revelation to humans. Thus, human beings must discern, by trial and error, what pleases and negatively impacts the spirits. As they discover these things, a tradition develops that is passed orally from generation to generation. Thus, Animists look to history and tradition to support their beliefs.

The problem they run into, though, is that different animistic groups have very different, and often contradictory, traditions – and there is no way to arbitrate between them. There is no way to have any confidence in any animistic belief.

Far Eastern Thought

Far Eastern Thought is typically considered to be both pantheistic and monistic. It is the belief that everything is divine and is made up of the same transcendent material. For believers in this worldview, ultimate reality is both immaterial and impersonal. Thus, the material reality we live in is illusory (not that it is not real, only that it exists in a form that does not represent actual reality). With that, it is impossible to know anything definitive about the natural universe using any material means. To discover that information, a person must somehow interact with the impersonal, immaterial reality that exists beyond material reality.

The way they do that is by seeking out various forms of human experience. They believe people can't "know" about ultimate reality, but they can "experience" it. They typically attempt this using some kind of exercise to alter their state of consciousness. The most common approaches involve practices like Zen meditation, yoga, tai chi, and the like. By these exercises, they believe they bypass human rationality and are able to directly connect with the transcendent impersonal life force to experience reality.

Similar to the problem that exists in Animism, there are also many different kinds of "experiences" people have as they engage these exercises. Thus, there is no way to arbitrate between conflicting Far Eastern Thought systems.

Beyond that, since human experience is an expression of material reality and is considered illusory, there is no way to be sure that any given experience is actually real. As such, there is no way to have confidence in any Far Eastern Thought belief.

Non-Christian Theism

Non-Christian Theism falls into the same worldview category as Christian Theism. Theism, in general, is the belief that a transcendent creator God exists who created the natural universe and has somehow revealed Himself to man. The specific nature and character of God varies according to the beliefs of the various belief systems. However, all claim that their god is the true one, and that what He has revealed represents true religion.

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Since all theistic belief systems are based on the same worldview foundation, there is no generic way to expose the weaknesses of non-Christian ones. To get at this, a person must study each one individually.

In doing this analysis, you will find that there will *always* be historical and/or logical problems. Historical problems involve purported history that can be shown to not be true. Logical problems will involve matters where what is asserted does not logically come together in a truthful way. The existence of either of these actually demonstrates the falsity of any non-Christian belief system.

Hybrids

Hybrid belief systems are faiths that try to incorporate beliefs from two or more of the above worldview categories. Logically this is impossible because every worldview literally contradicts every other one. For instance, God can't be personal and impersonal at the same time. Man can't be a direct creation of God and a naturally evolved animal at the same time (and so on). Thus, every hybrid belief system will have irreconcilable internal contradictions.

Because every hybrid belief system has its own unique combination of contradictory beliefs, there is no generic way to expose their weaknesses. It must be done individually, and it is done by pointing out the contradictory beliefs that are a part of any given hybrid religion.

So, What about Doubt?

At this point, we are in a position to ask the critical question. If you are having doubts about the validity of your Christian faith, what are you going to replace it with? There is no other belief system in existence that has a more solid foundation than the Christian faith. Every single one, as we have examined above, has serious problems that point to them not reflecting reality. Why would Christianity play second fiddle to any of them?

So what do we know? We know that there is some way that reality is actually structured. Whether a person feels confident about any given belief or not, there is some way that is real, and our life's quest should be to find it. Another thing we know is that knowledge about any belief system cannot be gained using empirical methods. There is no scientific test that can be done to find the ultimate truth about God. But there is a way.

One of the ways God has revealed Himself is in nature, so we can explore it based on natural laws and discern certain things such as:

- He is a God of order
- The natural universe cannot have created itself

But we can't know who He is without some kind of revelation.

The only belief systems that correspond to that are theistic belief systems. So we know that the first place to look is within Theism. But not all supposed revelations are the same. Virtually all theistic belief systems are based on some kind of revelation. So how can we know that the God of the Bible is the real God?

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The way we know is that not only He given us a guidebook, He is the only one who has revealed Himself to mankind personally. And that is the difference between Christianity and every other faith. When we engage Him in a personal relationship, He, in the form of the Holy Spirit, personally comes and indwells us, and our spirit and His Spirit fellowship personally. Other beliefs claim to know *about* God. Christians can actually know Him.

So, if you have come to know Him by faith in Jesus Christ and He has entered your life, you have experienced ultimate reality. You can know about Him through the revelation He has given in the Bible, but you know Him personally through your relationship with Him as the Holy Spirit and your spirit interact with each other.

If you have doubts and it is because you can't figure out how God could be real based on the fact that you don't see empirical proof, look around. No belief has that kind of proof. It doesn't exist. God cannot be known empirically. But He can be known personally. And if you have met Him personally through Jesus Christ, your personal relationship with Him is your proof. With that, you can throw your doubt away.