

# Why We Believe God Exists

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## Introduction: What We Learned from the Russians

In the early 1960's the space race was picking up steam. The very first person in space was Russian Yuri Gagarin on April 12, 1961. Apparently, when you are the first person to do something in space, you have to have a memorable quote. So, for Neil Armstrong it was "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." But when Gagarin returned to earth, the Soviets announced that he said, "I went up to space, but did not encounter God<sup>1</sup>." Two years later, in 1963, C.S. Lewis wrote an essay on space travel (a topic that deeply interested him) and said the following:

*Looking for God—or Heaven—by exploring space is like reading or seeing all Shakespeare's plays in the hope that you will find Shakespeare as one of the characters or Stratford as one of the places. Shakespeare is in one sense present at every moment in every play. But he is never present in the same way as Falstaff or Lady Macbeth<sup>2</sup>.*

I want to make two introductory points before we start in on this subject. First, I want to underscore Lewis's point. God is not discoverable in his creation in the same way that created things are discoverable. That's because he is not part of creation – he is the creator. Interacting with God is more like interacting with an author by reading his books than interacting with the characters in the books. And I feel like this is the hole that modern people fall into over and over again. They quote scientists who can't find God and philosophers who can't find God and mathematicians who can't find God and they assume that – if these learned people can't find God – well then, God must not exist. But that's like Lady Macbeth looking for Shakespeare. Not only will she not find Shakespeare, she may eventually come to believe Shakespeare doesn't exist at all. And then, by looking in the wrong place she has, in fact, denied her own existence in the process. Lewis went on to say in

the same essay, "I never had the experience of looking for God. It was the other way round; He was the hunter (or so it seemed to me) and I was the deer." Looking for God using human instruments is not only going to fail, it entirely misses the point. God is hunting us. You will never completely know that God exists until you come, taste, and see (Ps. 34:8).

The second point I want to make is this: Yuri Gagarin never said that quote that was attributed to him. It turns out Yuri Gagarin was a committed believer in Jesus who never renounced his faith. The quote, "I went up to space, but did not encounter God" was completely and totally fabricated by the Russian propaganda machine<sup>3</sup>. Why? Because Russia was officially an atheistic nation. Krushchev especially knew how dangerous belief in God could be to the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union. In fact, eyewitnesses later reported that the quote attributed to Yuri Gagarin was made up by Krushchev himself. He wanted to strengthen atheism in Russia. The point I am trying to make is simply this: no one is neutral on the subject of God. We all bring our biases. It's not that unbelievers cannot find evidence of God, it's that they don't want to find evidence of God. And some may even fabricate evidence against God. No one is neutral. Two people can examine the same evidence and one will find the fingerprints of God and the other will insist that the evidence proves that God does not exist. Our goal in apologetics isn't to be neutral either. Our goal is to present the reasons for our belief as clearly as possible so that others may believe.

## The Fingerprints of God

There are, quite literally, thousands of books written on the subject of God's existence. And there are hundreds and hundreds of arguments for the existence of God. Kreeft and Tacelli argue that there are as many as 20 categories of arguments, not to mention arguments themselves<sup>4</sup>. There is no way I can present a meaningful synopsis of all of the varied arguments for the existence of God today. So, I am going to pick three. I want to give you three specific arguments that represent bigger categories. And I have chosen these three arguments because I believe them to be especially helpful for our times today.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reallifestories.org/stories/1619/> Date accessed 8/14/23.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, C.S. (1995), *The Seeing Eye*, from *Christian Reflections* (p. 167), edited by Walter Hooper. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.reallifestories.org/stories/1619/> Date accessed 8/14/23.

<sup>4</sup> Kreeft P. & Tacelli R. K. (1994). *Handbook of Christian apologetics: hundreds of answers to crucial questions* (pp. -88). InterVarsity Press.

There are two big reasons for approaching this topic in this way. First, the study of apologetics is very generational. The arguments one generation finds helpful are different than the arguments the next generation finds helpful. I have found these three big ideas to be helpful for millennials and gen Z.

Second, the study of apologetics has two poles. On one hand, apologetics is primarily for believers. We need to know what we believe, why we believe it, and how to talk about it. Apologetics is most helpful for those of us who already believe. But on the other hand, apologetics is primarily for unbelievers. We need to have well thought out reasons to discuss with people who are bent toward skepticism. But these two poles of apologetics do not neatly overlap. Think about it like a Venn diagram. There are certain arguments that believers find convincing, but unbelievers largely do not. On the other side of the Venn diagram, however, there are arguments that unbelievers may find convincing. I want to aim for the center: arguments that may be convincing to both believers and unbelievers. And, as previously noted, that center changes generationally.

### **The World's Shared Dream**

Let's say you were in a room full of strangers. No one had ever met each other before that day. In the course of conversation, a man says, "I just have to tell you about this crazy dream I had last night. I dreamed that I was walking through a cornfield and came to a farm house. It was in the middle of nowhere. And on the porch was an old woman playing a guitar and singing this song. The song was haunting and I couldn't help but go up to the porch and listen to her sing. After a few minutes, the song ended and she looked at me and said, 'I've been waiting for you. We have a lot to talk about.' I sat down on the porch and she and I talked. And I just can't get this dream or the old woman out of my mind."

At that point, a woman says, "Wait a minute, I had a dream just like that last night. I dreamed of the same cornfield and the same woman. How is that possible?" And then a third person said that they had the same exact dream as well. And then a fourth. One by one, each person in the room said they had the same dream. All except one. A man named Larry. Larry said, "Hold on a second, this isn't possible. You are all just influencing each other to imagine that you had the same dream. It's not possible for a group of strangers to have the same dream on the same night." The first man who shared the dream said, "Well, there is a way we can verify it. Each of us should write down as many details from the dream as we possibly can. For example, what was the name

of the old woman? What song was she singing? What did the house look like? And so forth." And they all agreed that this is what they would do. After a few minutes they compared their answers. What they found was that some of them didn't remember the old woman's name, but those who did all agreed that her name was Abigail. Some of them didn't recognize the song she was singing, but those who did all agreed it was "Will the Circle Be Unbroken." And when one of them started humming it, even the people who didn't know the song all immediately said, "Yes! That's it!" There were some details that some people remembered about the old woman's house that others didn't, but they all agreed it was a large white farmhouse with a covered porch.

Again, Larry broke in and said, "Listen, this is just not possible. What must have happened is that you all watched the same TV show last night before you went to bed and then you dreamed about that show." But people were shaking their heads. One said she didn't own a TV. Another said he had been working out in the yard all night before going to bed. A third said he had been watching TV, but it was a baseball game: Detroit Tigers versus the Chicago Cubs. Tigers won, by the way. But Larry wouldn't give up. He said, "Ok, maybe you all read a similar article in a newspaper or watched the same YouTube video. Or maybe you are all trying to prank me or something. Or maybe you are all just lying. One thing I know for sure is that this many people cannot have the same dream."

But the others started to push back at this point. One said, "Hold on a minute, Larry. Perhaps you had the dream too, but you just can't remember it." One of the women started to become upset and said, "Who are you to question us? You saw us all write down our dreams and compare notes. Now you are telling us we are lying or hallucinating or pranking you? It seems like you are the odd man out here. If anyone is lying or pranking someone, it must be you given that the rest of us have this shared experience. I don't know how we all had the same dream and I probably will never know. I just know we did all have the same dream. And frankly, I am just a bit freaked out by it as well. I consider myself a rational person, but this doesn't feel rational to me and it has me rethinking everything." One by one, the others in the room expressed similar thoughts.

I think you can see where I am going with this. This is a fiction story, but the basic ideas of the story are true. For as long as we have written histories and stories passed down from generation to generation, we have found that people

believe in some sort of deity or god or supernatural being<sup>5</sup>. People who are convinced that there is no God whatsoever, atheists, are right about at 7% worldwide. That means that 93% of the nearly 8 billion people on this planet either believe in a God or are open to the idea that there is a God. The idea of God spans cultures and time. There appears to be a deeply planted seed of belief in the psyche of the human race. And our stories of our deities or gods or supernatural beings often have many points of agreement. This “god” or “gods” made the world, controls the world, sets standards for human behavior, punishes bad things and rewards good things. The names change, but the stories are very similar. And when you look back in time, that 93% grows even bigger.

And, of course, as soon as I say this, Larry will jump up and say things like, “Just because a whole bunch of people believe something doesn’t make it true. It’s just an ancient myth that has been handed down generation after generation.” But just like in the story, we might say to Larry, “But hold on a minute, Larry, these cultures with similar “god” myths are often separated from each other by hundreds if not thousands of years. Some are separated by oceans. Of course, their religious beliefs aren’t all the same, but the very idea that they all have the same basic idea (a supernatural being who controls the world) implies, at the very least, a past common experience.” And then another person adds, “And isn’t one of the core tenants of a civilized world that we honor each other’s beliefs and experiences? Isn’t it presumptuous and dismissive for you to say more than 90% of the human races’ experiences are fantasy?” And perhaps another person might pipe up and say, “And another thing Larry, why couldn’t the same be said about people like you? Who is to say that a belief that God DOESN’T exist isn’t a myth handed down from generation to generation as well?”

In fact, the research suggests exactly that. When you look at belief in a god or deity or higher power, it is evenly spread all over the planet. But when you look at the belief that God DOESN’T exist, it is highly regional<sup>6</sup>. Of the approximately 500-600 million convinced atheists in this world, it is estimated that 200 million of them are from one single country: China. And

many of the rest are from Japan and a handful of countries in Europe. Based on these maps, any intellectually honest person would have to say that it is atheism that tends to be based on a particular cultural myth in certain geographical areas, not the belief in God.

My point is that this “shared dream” of God is something that is very hard to explain. The human race appears to be hardwired for belief in God. We simply cannot let go of the idea. The pockets of Atheism in this world are far easier to explain. China’s government, for example, actively suppresses religion. And even before that, the primary “religion” of China was Confucianism which is religion without a central deity. So, guess what? Many people in China are atheists or don’t believe in a deity. Makes perfect sense.

Of course, this world-wide, culture-defying, time-defying belief in some sort of deity does not get us to the God of the Bible or Jesus, but it does get us to this very inescapable conclusion: in a room where everyone but one person had the same dream, it is far easier to believe that there is some truth to the dream. And the burden of proof isn’t on the majority, it’s on the minority.

Conclusion 1: *The burden of proof is on the atheist, not the theist.*

### **When Babies are Smarter than Adults**

But it isn’t just the idea of a supernatural deity that seems to pervade our lives. There is also this ongoing idea of right and wrong that is stunningly universal. There is a sort of morality that doesn’t need to be taught<sup>7</sup>. For many years, psychologists and philosophers have been telling us that humans are born as blank slates and any sort of moral framework is taught by parents and caregivers. It seems like a logical idea, right? I mean we all have met a baby or two and we know that the baby doesn’t know anything. Have you tried to carry on a conversation with a six-month old about mathematics? They are complete idiots when it comes to systems of equations. And they know nothing about politics either. That’s why we don’t let babies vote. Given

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<sup>5</sup> Wayne Grudem calls this phenomenon, “Humanity’s inner sense of God” and refers back to Rom. 1:19-25. In fact, the Bible would say it is only the fool who says there is no God (Ps. 14:1, 53:1). Grudem, W. (2020). *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Second Edition, p. 169). Zondervan Academic.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/atheists-countries-list-six-world-most-convinced-a6946291.html> Date accessed, 8/17/23.

<sup>7</sup> The framework of a moral and metaphysical necessity is taken from Schaeffer F. A. (2001). *He is there and he is not silent* (Rev. and updated), Tyndale House, and from Lewis, C.S (2017). *Mere Christianity* (Revised and amplified). William Collins. Lewis’s treatment of the moral argument in *Mere Christianity* is the simplest and easiest to read for those who are unfamiliar with the basic ideas of the argument.

everything they don't know, it seems a reasonable assumption that they are born a blank slate when it comes to right and wrong as well.

But they aren't. The same scientists who once said babies are moral blank slates have changed their tune. Why? Because the science tells us that very young babies have a sense of morality. The Yale University Infant Cognition Center has been conducting experiment after experiment that shows that very small babies understand basic morality. The research is nothing short of revolutionary. I would encourage you to watch the news article linked below<sup>8</sup>. Notice that this sense of morality is present in babies as young as 3 months old. Since the airing of this video, Yale University's Infant Cognition Center has continued to refine the research and they keep coming up with the same results. Morality does not need to be taught and babies are not blank slates. There is a sense of morality present at birth. This includes the ideas that evil exists and that we should resist evil, even if it means sacrifice. Of course, the problems that this sort of research brings up are obvious. How can there be an innate morality if morality is culturally constructed as opponents of religion have always asserted? But that's not even the biggest problem. No, the biggest problem is this: if there is an innate morality in the universe, what does it tell us and how strictly must we follow it? We don't have to think too hard to realize that many people are acting in direct opposition to these moral realities. But how can that be? If it is somehow in our DNA, how can we ignore it?

Well, let's go back to the Yale study. While it is true that babies have an innate sense of morality, it does not follow that they always act in accordance with their morality<sup>9</sup>. This is because selfishness doesn't need to be taught either. As the study showed, even babies are willing to compromise their inner sense of morality if the price is right. While there is a basic understanding of morality from birth, there is also a very deep selfishness and self-interest. How early was it when your children started to steal from each other, hit each other, and rebel against you as a parent?

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2014/02/12/us/baby-lab-morals-ac360/index.html#:~:text=They%20believe%20babies%20are%20in,they%20came%20to%20hat%20conclusion>. Date accessed 8/17/23.

<sup>9</sup> I hate to say this, but this applies to the occasional adult as well.

<sup>10</sup> Our internal monitor of how closely we are following the natural law is our conscience. But, we also know that the conscience can be corrupted and begin to measure the wrong things or measure the right things incorrectly. Interestingly, it is the Bible that teaches us the importance of our preserving our conscience (1 Tim. 4:2; 1 Cor. 8:12). In other words, the Bible's message isn't just, "Do what this book tells you to do." The Bible's message is also, "Do what your

What does appear to be culturally determined is how much a child is allowed to live selfishly. In other words, parents and other caregivers can "tune" these natural morals. If anything, parents too often remove the natural law from their children by not reinforcing it. And we all have seen that trauma, for example, can have devastating effects on our sense of right and wrong<sup>10</sup>. Experience and education cause us to forget, ignore, or doubt the natural law that we once had. In this way, babies are smarter than we are.

This research leaves the naturalistic atheist with a few really bad choices. They can either,

1. Accept the counter-intuitive and unscientific notion that there are no moral facts (that any moral system is a social construct and not an independent fact)<sup>11</sup>.
2. Accept that moral facts are a product of evolution despite the reality that evolutionists reject the notion that an impersonal and non-directed system can create "oughts" and "shoulds."
3. Accept a worldview where there is an independent and objective source of our morality<sup>12</sup>.

Conclusion 2: *We must reject any system that denies moral facts or teaches people to disregard those moral facts.*

Now again, this second conclusion doesn't get us to the God of the Bible, but it certainly narrows the field quite a bit. In order to get all of the way to the God of the Bible, we need to go one step further.

### **The Completely Irrational Belief in Human Rights**

Before we can talk about human rights, we need to talk about another natural law that has received a lot of attention over the last couple hundred years. Some call it the law of natural selection. Some call it, "survival of the fittest." It is this idea, first made popular by Charles Darwin, that species reject any

conscience tells you to do...but don't forget that your conscience can get messed up." This is the amount of confidence the Bible has in this natural law in our hearts.

<sup>11</sup> As an example, Richard Dawkins continues to stubbornly hold to the idea that there are no moral facts. He says, "The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is." Dawkins, R. (1995). *River out of eden* (p. 133). Basic Books.

<sup>12</sup> <https://crossexamined.org/every-christian-should-begin-to-master-the-moral-argument-today/> Date accessed 11/6/23.

adaptation that does not help it survive. Organisms that are somehow adapted for their environment will survive and those organisms that do not have the helpful adaptations will ultimately not survive. Natural selection is the mechanism that drives evolution.

There is just one problem with the law of natural selection: humans don't really follow it. Think about it for a minute. If a plant has an adaptation – let's say it is drought resistant – it survives far better than another plant that doesn't have that adaptation. If droughts keep happening, over time the non-drought resistant plants will all die off. Natural selection worked. The same is true in the animal kingdom...except for one species of animal: human beings. It's not just that humans don't follow it, we actually find the whole idea of natural selection morally repugnant<sup>13</sup>. The law of natural selection feels...well...unnatural. And violent. And predatory. Perhaps we have no problem with it when it comes to plants and animals, but we reject it completely when it comes to humans. When we see another human who is not as well adapted for survival in a particular environment, we go out of our way to help them survive. Why is this? The inescapable answer is that we see humans as categorically different than other species. There is an innate value to human life. And as a result, there are undeniable rights that belong to every person.

The question is, where did this belief in human rights come from if not from nature? Many civilizations have operated without human rights. We don't have to look too far into our history to find examples of civilizations that killed the weak (or let them die), refused to view slaves as human, refused to give women the same rights as men, and the list goes on and on. It is startling clear that, while we have an innate sense of morality, that morality has not inspired us as a species to see the value in every single person. No, this idea came from somewhere else.

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<sup>13</sup> Annie Dillard famously wrote, "There is not a person in the world that behaves as badly as praying mantises. But wait, you say, there is no right and wrong in nature; right and wrong is a human concept! Precisely! We are moral creatures in an amoral world...we can leave...go back to the creek, and live on its banks as untroubled as any muskrat or reed. You first." Dillard, A. (1974). *Pilgrim at Tinker creek*. Harper Collins.

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche F. W. & Metcalf S. (2012). *Thus spoke zarathustra: a book for all and non* (Part IV, "On the Higher Man."). Sun Vision Press.

<sup>15</sup> Most notoriously, the Nazi party was very intrigued by Nietzsche. Martin Heidegger, noted Nazi philosopher often quoted him. Mussolini also based his brand of fascism, at least in part,

And that "somewhere else" must have sufficient authority to overrule things like natural selection. In other words, the only sufficient authority is God. Without God, the idea of human rights is downright silly. Atheistic philosophers fully admit this. Nietzsche said, "'We are all equal – man is but man, before God we are all equal.' Before God! But now this God has died<sup>14</sup>." If there is no God, there is no prevailing reason to insist on basic human rights. It's little wonder the fascist regimes of the 1900's largely traced their philosophy back to Nietzsche<sup>15</sup>.

But it isn't just the idea of God that brings us to the conclusion that there are basic human rights. You don't find the same human rights in the Muslim tradition or in Hinduism, for example. Quite the opposite. It is one specific God and religious system that teaches us to value each and every human being: the God of the Bible. Nearly all of our modern beliefs about human rights can be traced to Christianity, many directly to Jesus of Nazareth<sup>16</sup>.

It is the Christian tradition that teaches us that humans are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). It is the God of the Bible who declares that men and women are equal in the eyes of God (Gal. 3:26-28). It was Jesus who said he came to bless the poor, the mourning, the meek, and the hungry (Matt. 5:3-6). It was Jesus who described his ministry as proclaiming the gospel to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberty for those who have been oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). It is the Bible that insists that the strong must fight for the weak and insure their welfare and justice (Ps. 82). It is the Bible that insists that God loves each of his children equally regardless of gender, national identity, and social status (Gal. 3:26-28)<sup>17</sup>.

on Nietzsche and his ideas. Schrift A. D. (2000). *Why nietzsche still? reflections on drama culture and politics*. Univ. of California Press.

<sup>16</sup> Wolterstorff argues that the basis for modern human rights is found in the medieval Christianity. Wolterstorff N. (2010). *Justice : rights and wrongs*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>17</sup> The Carter Center has created a "Scripturally Annotated Universal Declaration of Human Rights" that is very helpful. [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/human\\_rights/universal-declaration-human-rights-scripturally-annotated.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/human_rights/universal-declaration-human-rights-scripturally-annotated.pdf) Date accessed 11/6/23.

Tim Keller writes,

*If you believe human rights are a reality, then it makes much more sense that God exists than that he does not. If you insist on a secular view of the world and yet you continue to pronounce some things right and some things wrong, then I hope you see the deep disharmony between the world your intellect has devised and the real world (and God) that your heart knows exists<sup>18</sup>.*

In the first point, we made the case that it is atheism that has the burden of proof and it is atheism that is the cultural construct. In the second point, we made the case that there is a scientifically verifiable natural law to our world that does not need to be taught. Therefore, we should reject any religion or belief system that denies this as unscientific and based on people's wishes more than the evidence. But this one – this idea of human rights – narrows the world's religions down to one. It is the God of the Bible that believes in the value of every single human being.

*Conclusion 3: If you believe in human rights, you must reject naturalistic evolution, reject many of the world's religions, and cling to the God of the Bible.*

### **Conclusion: Lady MacBeth Meets Shakespeare**

Earlier I read a C.S. Lewis quote about how looking for God in nature is a bit like looking for Shakespeare in MacBeth. But for just a moment, let's go down that rabbit trail. How WOULD Lady MacBeth ever meet Shakespeare? Even though the entire play is, at least in some way, about Shakespeare, the only way for Lady MacBeth to meet Shakespeare is this: Shakespeare would have to write himself into her story as one of the characters.

Ultimately, this is exactly what God did for us. God wrote himself in our story. We can look at the design of the universe and decide there must be a designer. We can look at the value we place on human life and decide there must be a love in the universe that is bigger than us. But ultimately, the truest expression of God is Jesus (Heb. 1:1-4).

While we can devise clever arguments and appeal to statistics and science and nature and human rights, none of these things will ever convert the soul. What will convert the soul is a personal interaction between creator and us, his creation. When we read the accounts of Jesus, we realize that God has been hunting us all along, as C.S. Lewis said. And then, we enter a real and profound relationship with him. Before the foundations of the world were laid, God knew that he needed to write himself into the story and that moment changed everything (1 Pet. 1:13-21).

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<sup>18</sup> Keller T. (2008). *The reason for God: belief in an age of skepticism* (p. 156). Dutton.