

“Dealing With Doubts” Conference

Critical Questions – Compelling Answers

Richard Knopp, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.

Director, Room For Doubt (www.roomfordoubt.com)

Professor Emeritus of Philosophy & Christian Apologetics, Lincoln Christian University

Email: rich@roomfordoubt.com

www.richknopp.com

Conference Webpage: www.richknopp.com/dealing-with-doubts-VCC

The Existence and Character of God

Introduction

- A. Some central claims of Christianity (Heb. 1:1-2; 11:6; John 1:1,14; John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:4-5; Acts 17:31).
- B. Defending Christian truth (1 Pet. 3:15; Col. 2:8; 2 Cor. 10:5; 2 Tim. 2:24-25; Jude 3).
 1. Sermons in the book of Acts (e.g. Acts 2:14-36; 7:1-53; 17:16-34; 26:1-29).
 2. **1 Peter 3:15** DEFEND [*apologia* > apologetics] the faith.
 3. **Col. 2:8** “Don’t be taken CAPTIVE by deceptive philosophies.”
 4. **2 Cor. 10:5** “We DEMOLISH arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.”
- C. Doubts about Christian truth (some stats).
- D. Encourage questions; address doubts; strengthen faith!

QUESTION #1 Why Believe that God Exists?

- A. Many reasons to believe in God’s existence.
- B. The Bible points to nature, which points to God (Isa. 45:18; Ps. 19:1-2; Rom. 1:20).

I. The Origin of the Universe

- A. Scripture points to a beginning (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 33:6; Isaiah 45:12; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 11:3).
- B. “Big Bang cosmology”:
 1. The universe **BEGAN**.
 2. Big Bang proposed (Hubble in 1920s), opposed, but eventually accepted (1960s).

“What we found is evidence for the birth of the universe.... It’s like looking at God” (George Smoot, leader of the Cosmic Background Explorer project).

- C. An important argument for God (see William Lane Craig and www.reasonablefaith.org).
 1. Whatever begins to exist must have a cause.
 2. The universe began to exist.
 3. Therefore, the universe had a cause.
- D. Prominent non-creationist options about our universe:
 1. It is eternal.
 2. It caused itself.
 3. It is just one of an *infinite* number of universes that pop into existence (multiverse theory).

Stephen Hawking (atheist): “Bodies such as stars or black holes cannot just appear out of nothing. But a whole universe can.... Because there is a law like gravity, *the universe can and will create itself from nothing*” (*The Grand Design*, 180; emphasis added).

Alex Rosenberg (atheist): “Why is there a universe at all? No reason at all. Why is there a multiverse in which universes pop into existence for no reason at all? No reason at all! (Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions*, Kindle, pp. 38-39).

II. The Origin of Life.

A. The universe **began JUST RIGHT for life** (“fine-tuning” of the universe).

1. Precise physical constants (dozens of them). (cf. The “Goldilocks Principle”).
 - a. e.g. Expansion rate of the universe.
 - b. e.g. Strength of gravity.
 - c. e.g. Number of electrons to protons (e.g. illustration of dimes).

Fred Hoyle (non-creationist): “A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that **a superintellect has monkeyed with physics**, as well as with chemistry and biology, and there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature” (emphasis added).

B. The wonders of **DNA**.

1. Life requires (a) the right materials, (b) the correct sequencing of amino acids, and (c) information to instruct the correct sequencing.
2. DNA contains the information, but how did it get its vast information?
3. The DNA in one human body, if stretched end-to-end, would reach over 42 billion miles!
4. One gram of DNA could store the same amount of information as 468,000 DVD's.
5. DNA could store all of the world's data in one room!

Francis Crick (atheist and co-discoverer of DNA): “An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that in some sense . . . [the origin of life] is ‘almost a miracle.’ ... Every time I write a paper on the origin of life, I swear I will never write another one, because there is too much speculation running after too few facts” (*Life Itself: Its Origin and Nature*, 88, 153).

Antony Flew (at age of 81 converted from atheism to theism): “I think the most impressive arguments for God's existence are those that are supported by recent scientific discoveries.... I now believe that the universe was brought into existence by an infinite Intelligence. I believe that this universe's intricate laws manifest what scientists have called the Mind of God” (*There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, p. 88).

QUESTION #2: Why would a “Good” God allow pain and suffering?

I. God valued human freedom.

- A. Why didn't God create a world without pain and suffering? He DID! (Gen. 1-2).
- B. Human freedom eventually produced pain, suffering, and death (Gen. 3).
- C. Why did God give human freedom?
 1. To make genuine LOVE possible (vs. robots).
 2. But freedom allows devastating consequences.
- D. Human freedom created “moral evil” with pain and suffering.

II. God established natural laws (uniformity in nature's operation).

- A. Natural laws can create pain and suffering (“natural evil”).
- B. Why would God set up natural laws?
 1. To make the “Dominion Mandate” possible (Gen. 1:26 “... let them rule over ...”).
 2. To make prediction (and science) possible.

3. To make moral accountability possible.
4. To make “normal” physical life possible.

C. Nature is **“fallen”** (Gen. 3:16; Rom. 8:18-22).

Rom. 8:19-22 ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

D. There is a **“cosmic conflict”**: God vs. Satan and “fallen” angels (Isa. 14:12-15; Lk. 10:17-18; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6; Eph. 2:2; 6:12; Rev. 12:3-4,7-17).

1. Job suffered because of Satan’s activity (Job 1).
2. Satan: “the ruler of this world” (Jn. 14:30); the “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4); “the ruler of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2); “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 Jn. 5:19).

III. God can make GOOD come from pain and suffering (Rom. 8:28; Gen. 50:20; Phil. 1:12-14).

Rom 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Gen. 50:20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Phil. 1:12-14 ¹²I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

- A. We can learn greater **COMPASSION** (e.g. Luke 10: The Good Samaritan).
- B. We can face our finiteness and our destiny of **DEATH** (Heb. 9:27).
- C. We can become more **DEPENDENT** on God through trials (Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:2-4; 2 Cor. 1:8-9; Matt. 8:23-27 Jesus calming the storm).
- D. We can be prompted to **REPENT** (Lk. 13:4-5).

Lk. 13:4-5 ⁴Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

IV. Only God offers an ultimate resolution to pain and suffering.

A. The **past**: God has acted.

1. The biblical story of God’s redemption.
2. The crucifixion of Jesus.
 - a. Jesus suffered. (vs. Buddhism: eliminate all desire to eliminate all suffering)
 - b. It was not possible for God to cover sin without suffering (Mk. 14:35-36; Matt. 26:39; Lk. 22:42).

Matt 26:39 ³⁹And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

B. The **present**.

1. The Bible highlights the inevitability of suffering (e.g. Job, Jesus, John the Baptist, Paul (2 Cor. 11:23-27)).
2. God knows and He cares (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

1 Pet. 5:6-7 ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

C. The **future**: All pain must be seen in light of God's eternal plan (2 Cor. 4:7-9,17; Rom. 8:18; Rev. 21:1-4).

2 Cor 4:8-9,17-18 ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;... ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."

Rom. 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Rev. 21:4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

QUESTION #3: How could a "good" God send some to hell?

- A. There will be a **final judgment** for everyone (Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15).
- B. Hell is a **horrendous reality** referred to by Jesus (Matt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 15:36-43; 23:33).
- C. Hell is primarily prepared for sinful angels, but **some humans will not inherit the kingdom of God** (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3-6).
1. **2 Peter 2:4** "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment."
 2. **Matt. 7:21-23** "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven."
 3. **Matt. 25:41** "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"
- D. The righteous God also has **great love and mercy**.
1. God "so loved the world" that he gave his son (John 3:16).
 2. God "desires *all* people to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4).
 3. God does not want any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).
- E. God's mercy is **broader** than some may think (see Matt. 7:13-14 about a "narrow" gate and "few" who find life).
1. The Gentile Centurion: Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel" (Matt 8; Luke 7).
 2. **Luke 4:24-29** [Jesus]. Elijah and Elisha were sent to Gentiles!
 3. Cornelius (Acts 10): Peter said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God" (v. 31).
- F. God's rewards and condemnation will have **different "levels."**
1. "According to our deeds" (2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 16:27; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 18:4-7 [Babylon]).
 2. Some judgment will be "more severe" (Mark 12:38-40; Matt. 11:21-24; Heb. 10:29; James 3:1).
 3. Judgment may depend on one's level of knowledge and capacity for understanding (Deut. 1:39; Luke 12:47-48; Lk. 23:34; John 15:22-24; 1 Tim. 1:13).