

BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW APOLOGETICS – Lessons 6

CRITIQUE OF ATHEISM (continued)

ORIGIN OF COSMOS / UNIVERSE

Point #1) Biblical view:

-- **God purposely created the cosmos supernaturally, in 6 literal days, for His Glory.** We know this because God's Word in Scripture tells us this. We can say confidently that we "know" this is true by the authority of God's Word.

Point #1) Atheistic view:

-- **Cosmos came into being by wholly "natural" means.** There should be no assumption of any supernatural creation of the universe because science cannot prove it. It's not necessary to assume the cosmos had any "cause." One can simply assume that matter and energy have always existed.

Point #1) Christian critique of the atheistic view:

-- **The Bible provides a literal history of the origin of the cosmos and mankind.** The Bible's account of Creation is rational because the existence of the cosmos and its natural order presupposes the "Supernaturalism," of the Triune God of scripture, as opposed to "Naturalism." There is no scientific evidence whatsoever that so-called "natural laws," or "matter," or "energy" can, or ever have, created themselves. Nothing observed in "the cosmos" suggests that anything in nature, including the entire Cosmos, can create itself. **The atheistic view is both irrational and unscientific.**

-- God is all-powerful and the existence of the universe screams out the existence of its Creator (the Triune God of scripture).

We might ask the atheist:

"Where has a scientist ever observed matter or energy coming from nothing? Where has this ever been shown to happen?"

"Science is about repeatable testing. Doesn't the idea that matter and energy are eternal come from a naturalistic faith (especially in the opinions of secular, atheistic scientists), instead of science? In other words, it's not a question of physics, but rather metaphysics, isn't it? After all, is it not a question of scientific experimentation, but rather a fundamental belief that is a part of an atheistic / naturalistic worldview?"

"Do you believe in laws of nature? Yes? How is it that chance, random causes (that supposedly gave birth to the universe) somehow gave way to unchanging natural laws (i.e., regularities in nature) that now operate?"

“How is it that the universe can be caused by ‘randomness’ and ‘chance’ – and yet it now operates via reliable ‘natural laws’?”

Point #2) Biblical view:

-- **God created the world by decree, with “special” (i.e., “non-normative”) decrees / means.** God afterward gave “**normative” decrees** by which the cosmos would continue to operate ... there is no such thing as “natural laws,” but rather the Providence of God (via His decrees), that rules over the heavens and the earth.

-- So-called “laws of nature” might better be called “regularities of nature” (i.e., the normal processes and functions of creation that function according to God’s decrees).

“Every particle in the universe operates under the direction of the Sovereign decree of God.” – R.C. Sproul

Point #2) Atheistic view:

Atheist Quote: *“The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be.” - Carl Sagan*

-- **Cosmos came into being by accident ... over eons of time (billions of years),** likely through the occurrence of a “big bang.” Matter itself either came into being via the big bang, or, matter itself is eternal (has eternally existed). The origin of the universe was a wholly natural, random, chance, and purposeless (i.e., there was no divine hand to guide it, give it direction or intend it to have any diving purpose).

Point #2) Christian critique of the atheistic view:

-- **The idea that the cosmos came into being through random, unguided natural processes is simply a statement of blind faith.** There is ZERO empirical evidence that “something comes from nothing” or that “matter is eternal.” These ideas can never be “observed” or scientifically confirmed.” They are just arbitrary statements of “blind atheistic faith.

-- The idea that matter and/or energy is eternal is an atheistic substitution for belief in the eternal God. God exists in eternity and His Triune Being is wholly separate from Creation. God existed prior to the cosmos, and even now, exists separately from time and space (although God is intimately present and involved with both space and time). Only God is truly eternal. God alone is time-less and space-less.

We might ask the atheist:

“Where does science observe that the cosmos came into being by accident? Nowhere? If science is about observation and testing, and this idea doesn’t allow for such scientific testing, then how does this assumption qualify as a scientific view?”

“Isn’t the notion that the cosmos came into being by accident simply an atheistic statement of faith?”

“Where did the matter and energy that exists in the cosmos come from? If one says ‘matter is eternal’ then how could it have always existed, without any cause to bring it into existence? Isn’t this notion just an atheistic faith belief that tries to propose an alternative to the biblical story of creation in Genesis?”

“Is not the eternal, supra-natural God of the Bible a logical first cause for all of the cosmos? If you answer, ‘No’, then why not? Does the atheistic view simply not presuppose the non-existence of God, while the Christian view presupposes the Biblical view of God? Does not the Christian view account for the reality of creation, while the atheistic view does not?”

Theistic Evolution?

Often, religious persons who basically accept most of the basic assumptions for the completely naturalistic atheistic view of the origins of the universe and Darwinian evolution will say something like, *“I believe in the Big Bang and evolution as taught by secular scientists, but I also believe that it was ‘god’ who was behind it all. It was ‘god’ who directed the whole process.”*

Possible Christian response: *“What ‘god’ are you referring to? It couldn’t be the Triune God of Scripture ... the one true God ... the God of the Bible! The God of the Bible reveals Himself clearly to us, and God told us exactly how He created the heavens and the earth and mankind in the book of Genesis. So you must be talking about another conception of ‘god.’ But where did you obtain your belief in such a ‘god.’ Has this so-called ‘god’ revealed himself to you in some way? Did this ‘god’ tell you that he oversaw a Big Bang and an evolutionary process to create life on earth? No? Then why try and interject (smuggle) a belief about a non-existing ‘god’ into an atheistic view of origins? Why would you try and do that? Could it be that you have an immoral desire to side with the opinions of certain people, rather than hold to God’s Word by faith? Or, could it be that you’re trying to suppress your knowledge of the Triune God of the Bible ... because you know that the whole Big Bang thing, along with Darwinian evolution, is nonsensical?”*

“If someone cannot trust the Word of God when it says God made the heavens and the earth, as recorded in Genesis, then how can that person trust God’s Word when it says Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead in order to give us eternal life? Is this not a valid question?”

ORIGIN OF COSMOS / UNIVERSE (as it relates to “MEANING” / “PURPOSE”)

"Meaning" (definition)

... Something that is conveyed or intended, especially by language; sense or significance: "The writer's meaning was obscured by convoluted prose."

... An interpreted goal, intent, or end: "The central meaning of his pontificate is to restore papal authority."

... The thing one intends to convey especially by language: "Do not mistake my meaning."

... Something meant or intended: "Mischievous meaning was apparent"

Point #1) Biblical view:

-- **God created the cosmos and all life with a plan, intended meaning and purpose.** All things find meaning in the plan, meaning and purpose of God, the Creator. God's plan is eternal in terms of human history and the future. All things exist for His glory and to reflect the glory of God, especially human beings. Westminster Short Catechism: "Q.1: What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

-- God has ordained all things by virtue of his eternal decree. All of human history, the present and future events have been foreordained by God for reasons that will accomplish His plans and purposes and bring Him glory.

(Psalm 135:4-6) (Isaiah 14:27) (Isaiah 46:9-12) (Daniel 2:21)

-- Human life, relationships and work all have a Godly purpose and eternal significance because our beliefs and actions in this life interact with God's plan in eternity.

Point #1) Atheistic view:

-- **Everything in the cosmos, including all humanity, came about by pure cosmic chance.**

-- The universe itself operates according to natural, physical laws. There is no such thing as "God's providence" or governance in the cosmos.

-- There is no objective meaning or purpose associated with anything since matter and energy simply interact, in accordance with, unguided natural laws, which themselves came about from random, chance forces.

-- Human beings are ultimately insignificant, finite specs of matter within in a nearly infinite, larger cosmos.

-- The cosmos will likely end at some point, similarly to how it began – accidentally - with no rhyme, reason or objective purpose.

Point #1) Christian critique of the atheistic view:

-- According to many atheists' own words, a cosmos that came about by accident, and composed simply of matter and energy, is inherently purposeless. There is no "intention" in an accidental "big bang" cosmology. A universe that exists, by accident, apart from the sovereign, intentional design by God automatically implies meaninglessness. And if no meaning, then there is no intended purpose, and there is no objective, intended or inherent cosmic meaning exists for anything, including the CREATURES that live in that universe.

-- Such a belief contradicts itself, however, because no human being can meaningfully say, "*There is no objective meaning in the universe.*" Why? Because that statement is intentionally meaningful. Interpreting human thoughts and actions assumes (presupposes) meaning. For a human being to intentionally say, "*There is no inherent meaning or purpose within the cosmos*"

is itself meant to be an intentional statement. The person saying it intends their statement to be meaningful, from the speaker to the listener.

-- If there is no objective meaning in the universe then it's very odd that all of humanity (all peoples and cultures) constantly try to affirm their own meaning and purpose, for both the cosmos and the life of all its creatures.

-- If human beings live in a meaningless and purposeless universe then the notions such as "LOVE," or "BRAVERY" or "COURAGE" have no meaning. These ideas would be, in reality, just meaningless, empty concepts.

We might ask the atheist:

"Do you agree the life, and beliefs and actions of human beings DOES HAVE consequential meaning within the Christian biblical worldview, but DO NOT HAVE any meaning within an atheistic worldview?"

"Are you purposely and intentionally saying a meaningful statement - when you say to me the cosmos (and by default, everything in it) has no objective meaning?"

"If the larger cosmos has no God-given meaning or purpose, then it doesn't matter if finite human creatures within that cosmos try and generate some sort of meaning in it, regardless of their finite, individual actions or feelings. In such a worldview, finite humans are simply confusing feelings with meaning. But feelings don't create meaning. They are just bio-chemical reactions (i.e., feelings)."

"How do purpose or meaning exist within a random, chance universe? They don't. But yet you attach meaning to your beliefs, words and actions. Does this not show you really know God is real and you are trying to suppress your innate knowledge of Him?"

"If the atheistic view of human beings is true then there is nothing special or significant about human beings in general, or human societies or human culture in general, is there? But if so, doesn't this contradict the espoused views of most atheists, who always say they want to help people and work to build a 'better world?' How can atheists seek to make a 'better world' if the concept of 'better' is meaningless?"

"If the atheistic view of human nature is true then there is no way for human beings to objectively (i.e., truthfully, logically) judge or distinguish between what is 'better' or not when it comes to human beings or the human condition or human societies, in general. Right? The funny thing is most atheists make very judgmental statements about the human condition and what they think ought or ought not to be all the time. Why do you think they do this?"

“How can tiny specs of matter that exist as sub-forms (i.e., such as human beings) within the larger material cosmos define the purpose or meaning of the greater matter? In other words, the cosmos doesn’t really have any meaning or purpose at all, so why would anyone be enamored or excited by it? Or refer to it as ‘AMAZING’ or ‘BEAUTIFUL’?”

“Should all human beings be valued the same? Do they all possess the same inherent worth? If so, based upon what? Who says? After all, are not human beings going to answer in relation to what their particular DNA determines their opinion(s) is/are going to be?”

MORALITY / ETHICS / SO-CALLED “PROBLEM OF EVIL”

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL (Theodicy)

-- **What is the so-called "the problem of evil"** and why is it argued to be a problem within the Christian worldview?

Excerpt from the book, Faith with Reason:

“The essence of this argument is that the presence of evil in this world is inconsistent with the Bible’s teaching that God is both good and all-powerful. Both propositions are set forth to point out a supposed logical contradiction within Christian doctrine regarding the character of God.

Philosopher David Hume described the issue this way: “Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent.” Writer C. S. Lewis rephrased it: “If God were good, He would wish to make his creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore, God lacks either goodness, or power, or both.”

The skeptic contends that if there is a God who willingly permits evil then He could not be good. God Himself would be sadistic to permit such a thing. On the other hand, if God is not able to remove evil then He cannot be omnipotent. Either way it is impossible to rationally conclude that God can be both good and omnipotent in the face of evil’s obvious existence. Since Christians affirm both

of these characteristics are part of God's nature the question they are faced with is, 'How is it possible to believe that God is both good and omnipotent in light of the fact that there is evil in the world?' "

Biblical, Christian view of evil / sin / goodness:

- How can we define 'good' versus 'evil' within a biblical worldview?
- Mankind is created in God's image. As image bearers of God the standard of goodness is the holiness of God ... the perfect nature of our Creator.

Excerpt from the book, Faith with Reason:

Christianity teaches that moral law is rooted in the very character and nature of God. Something is not good because God arbitrarily wills it is good. Nor does God decree that something is good because there is some standard above Him to which He must conform. God is good, and since man has been created in God's image, man's character ought to reflect the character of his Creator. (1 Pet 1:15-16)

- Mankind was created without sin, but with the ability to sin. Adam & Eve chose to try and usurp God and become a law unto themselves, and fell into sin ... sin is now inherent and present within the human nature itself.
- Additionally, we commit individual acts of sin, both sins of commission and sins of omission
- Human beings possess Inherent worth / dignity, as image bearers of God. Human life is special, and reflects the image of God, the Creator of life. This is why murder (the unjust taking of human life) is morally wrong (evil) in the Christian biblical worldview.
- Human beings were given a mandate by God to "subdue" the earth, exercising dominion over the earth in *moral ways*, wisely managing the earth's resources, and conducting a stewardship over creation. This would include all of the work involved in the resulting economies, including growing/farming, working in trades and doing jobs that come from production and ethical interaction with other human beings. Human work is dignified and provides a service to others in the world. As one does work that needs to be done for both survival and prosperity, God is glorified.

Given the biblical, Christian view, then the following definition of morality makes sense...

-- Morality (def.)

"The quality of being in accord with standards of right or good conduct."

"Morality (from Latin: moralitas, lit. 'manner, character, proper behavior') is the differentiation of intentions, decisions and actions between those that are distinguished as proper (right) and those that are improper (wrong)."

Atheistic view:

Atheist Quote: *"If our hearing were sufficiently acute to catch every note of pain, we would be deafened by one continuous scream."* - T.H. Huxley (Darwin's Bulldog)

-- Man acts in subjection to the "laws of nature." Humans are ultimately controlled by their DNA. Human actions are the result of human thoughts that are a result of the natural, organic processes of the brain. Free thinking is an illusion ... human beings think (and ultimately act) what their individual brains tell them to think.

-- There is no such thing as "sin," but rather "undesirable behaviors" expressed by many people.

-- Human beings possess no inherent worth / dignity. Governments form laws that "make it wrong" to take life, depending upon the dominant values/desires of any given society. In other words, "Law" begins and ends with human beings (via human government laws).

Accounting for evil within the Christian worldview – How to address the issue from a purely logical standpoint

The Problem of Evil – a "problem" in the sense that it is usually proposed as a "logical dilemma" for those who hold a Christian worldview in the following way...

The following propositions are given:

- 1) Evil Exists.
- 2) God is All-Good.
- 3) God is All-Powerful.

Atheistic Conclusion: A good God would destroy evil. An all-powerful God could destroy evil. So, God could not be both all good and all-powerful as taught within the Bible.

Christian response: Christian believers must point out that evil is not a problem for the Christian believer, but rather it is the *non-Christian* who cannot account for evil apart from God.

How so?

Evil -> Presupposes Moral Law -> Requires Universal, Invariant Moral Lawgiver -> God

The existence of "evil" actually presupposes the reality of the Triune God of Scripture.

The logical tension (proposed above in the first 3 propositions) is removed by adding a fourth premise:

- 4) God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil.

Deut 29:29 - The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever,
that we may follow all the words of this law.

Job 2:7-10, James 5:11, Genesis 50:20, Psalm 105:17, Acts 4:27-28

Christians assume most people, including most professing atheists, can recognize morality and practice ethical conduct at certain times (at least on a surface-level).

Most atheists would probably agree with the following statement, *"It would be wrong for a soldier to torture a little child, for personal pleasure, in a foreign nation that his army has invaded."*

But why do they? What enables a professing atheist to recognize the existence of such evil? As Christians, we say, *"The Law of God is planted within the hearts. Atheists, even though they deny it, are image-bearers of God. Their common recognition of evil is evidence they are suppressing their inward knowledge of God, who is their Creator and Lawgiver."*

Christians can always point out to atheists that an IS is not an OUGHT; recognizing that something IS a certain way doesn't mean it OUGHT to be that way.

Most theists will say morality and ethics can create satisfactory moral/ethical laws using an ever-changing assortment of individual choices and ever-changing societal constructs.

Here are a few ways atheists try and define morality apart from the character and nature of God, along with some general ways we, as Christians, might respond...

Atheist statements:

"There really is no such thing as objective goodness. It's all a game of pretend that human beings like playing. People shouldn't make moral statements because there is no such thing as objective morality."

Possible Christian replies:

"Did you just make an objective statement regarding morality?"

"Do you believe we live in a godless, random, chance universe? Yes? If we live in a random, chance universe, then are not all events simply random, chance events? How can any events be good or evil? Are not all events simply interactions between matter and energy? But there is actually no such thing as objective morality then it okay if I tell lies to you? Or steal from you? Or murder you?"

Atheist statement:

"Individuals decide for themselves what is 'good' or 'bad,' God isn't needed to define right or wrong."

Possible Christian replies:

"Who says? How do you know? But even if that were so then wouldn't one's personal generosity equal another's cruelty?"

Atheist statement:

"Majority approval determines what is right and wrong."

Possible Christian replies:

“Who says? How do you know?”

“The majority of what? The majority in a town? A city? A region? A State? A culture? Who said? What if an individual or group of individuals disagree?”

For example, was it wrong for minority Jews in Germany to think they were being mistreated by the Nazi majority in Germany?

Or, was it wrong for Germans to imprison Jews prior to the Nazis coming to power in Germany in the 1930s ... but those acts then became immoral, after they lost the war? Should Jews have been able to argue their treatment by the Nazis was immoral during the 1930s?

Or was it moral for the Aztecs to engage in human sacrifice of individuals from other native American tribes because that was a part of their religious culture in the 16th century? Was it okay for minority tribes in the region to disagree?

Or should Britain have refrained from outlawing the practice of widow-burning in India in the 19th century if that was a part of the dominant Indian culture?”

Atheist statement:

“Something is moral if it brings the greatest 'good' to the 'greatest number' of persons.”

Possible Christian replies:

“Who says? How do you know?”

“This statement still doesn't define what exactly is 'good'? The answer begs the question about what is 'good,' in the first place.”

“Would this statement also imply that a majority of persons can oppress minority groups if they felt good about a particular action or policy?”

Desiring God Ministries – excerpt from “Is God Less Glorious Because He Ordained that Evil Be?”

...Thus in one sense God wills that what he hates come to pass, as well as what he loves.

[Jonathan] Edwards says,

God may hate a thing as it is in itself, and considered simply as evil, and yet . . . it may be his will it should come to pass, considering all consequences. . . . God doesn't will sin as sin or for the sake of anything evil; though it be his pleasure so to order things, that he permitting, sin will come to pass; for the sake of the great good that by his disposal shall be the consequence. His willing to order things so that evil should come to pass, for the sake of the contrary good, is no argument that he doesn't hate evil, as evil: and if so, then it is no reason why he may not reasonably forbid evil as evil, and punish it as such.

This is a fundamental truth that helps explain some perplexing things in the Bible, namely, that God often expresses his will to be one way, and then acts to bring about another state of affairs.

God opposes hatred toward his people, yet ordained that his people be hated in Egypt (Genesis 12:3; Psalm 105:25 – "He turned their hearts to hate his people."). He hardens Pharaoh's heart, but commands him to let his people go (Exodus 4:21; 5:1; 8:1). He makes plain that it is sin for David to take a military census of his people, but he ordains that he do it (2 Samuel 24:1; 24:10). He opposes adultery, but ordains that Absalom should lie with his father's wives (Exodus 20:14; 2 Samuel 12:11). He forbids rebellion and insubordination against the king, but ordained that Jeroboam and the ten tribes should rebel against Rehoboam (Romans 13:1; 1 Samuel 15:23; 1 Kings 12:15-16). He opposes murder, but ordains the murder of his Son (Exodus 20:13; Acts 4:28). He desires all men to be saved, but effectually calls only some (1 Timothy 2:4; 1 Corinthians 1:26-30; 2 Timothy 2:26)....

It is evident from what has been said that it is not because he delights in evil as evil. Rather he "wills that evil come to pass . . . that good may come of it." What good? Here is Edwards' stunning answer:

It is a proper and excellent thing for infinite glory to shine forth; and for the same reason, it is proper that the shining forth of God's glory should be complete; that is, that all parts of his glory should shine forth...Thus it is necessary, that God's awful majesty, his authority and dreadful greatness, justice, and holiness, should be manifested...

If it were not right that God should decree and permit and punish sin, there could be no manifestation of God's holiness in hatred of sin, or in showing any preference, in his providence, of godliness before it. There would be no manifestation of God's grace or true goodness, if there was no sin to be pardoned, no misery to be saved from. How much happiness soever he bestowed, his goodness would not be so much prized and admired. . .

So evil is necessary, in order to the highest happiness of the creature, and the completeness of that communication of God, for which he made the world; because the creature's happiness consists in the knowledge of God, and the sense of his love. And if the knowledge of him be imperfect, the happiness of the creature must be proportionably imperfect.

So the answer to the question in the title of this message, "Is God less glorious because he ordained that evil be?" is no, just the opposite. God is more glorious for having conceived and created and governed a world like this with all its evil.
