

Refutation of William Lane Craig's argument for the existence of God:

A response to Prof. Craig's debate with Prof. Peter Millican on 2011 October 21

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The debate is posted at www.premier.org.uk/unbelievable.

In this debate, Prof. Craig augments the three-step argument given in his debate with Prof. Law by adding two points. However, the three-step argument is a well-designed, self-contained argument, needing no additional steps. It will stand or fall on its merits, and I refer the reader to my refutation of that argument in my article on the debate with Prof. Law. The two additional points constitute an effort of Prof. Craig to bolster the idea of God's existence with supporting evidence, and I will address these points in this article.

The two points pertain to the following: the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life, and a person's personal experience of God. Note that, for each point, I indicate the starting location of the point in the online audio recording of the debate.

The universe is fine-tuned for the existence of intelligent life. (15:48)

Prof. Craig explains that science identifies laws of nature, such as the law of gravity, along with parameter values that are not determined by the laws of nature, such as the gravitational constant in the law of gravity and the amount of entropy in the early universe. Prof. Craig explains that if these parameter values were slightly different — “by less than a hair's breadth” — life would not exist. (16:48-17:10)

Prof. Craig goes on to say that the set of parameter values constitutes a pattern — like a sequence of prime numbers — that can be recognized as such. In this case, according to Prof. Craig, we have a pattern that — in conjunction with the laws of nature — establishes a universe for the existence of intelligent life. Prof. Craig asserts that such a pattern provides evidence of intelligent design.

The idea that a pattern can exhibit — or fail to exhibit — properties due to intelligent design is a vacuous idea developed by proponents of the intelligent design movement. It is easy to see that the idea is vacuous by assuming that the universe is the result of intelligent design, as the intelligent design movement assumes. In this scenario, everything about the universe is the result of intelligent design, implying that it is impossible to exhibit any example of an object, activity, or event that is not the result of intelligent design. So how can we characterize something that is not designed? Something that is not designed is something that the intelligent designer could not create, and there are two kinds of such things: the intelligent designer himself/itself and anything that is logically impossible. It follows that anything that exists — except for the intelligent designer — is necessarily designed irrespective of its properties, thereby making the “fine-tuning” of the universe irrelevant to the idea of intelligent design.

As I explain in my books, what the intelligent design movement refers to as evidence of design is nothing more than evidence of our ability to understand the relevant phenomena. As we come to understand a given phenomenon, our ability to predict its behavior improves, and we naturally think of this as evidence of design, while, in fact, it's nothing more than evidence of our ability to understand the phenomenon and to thereby predict its behavior.

The personal experience of God. (26:15)

Prof. Craig says that a person can experience God directly, independent of understanding arguments for God's existence. Based on a statement in the Bible, Prof. Craig asserts the following:

If you're sincerely seeking God, God will make his existence evident to you.... We mustn't so focus on the external proofs that we fail to hear the inner voice of God to our own heart. For those who listen, God becomes an immediate reality in their lives. (27:08)

Religion has played a central and pervasive role in human culture throughout human history. Religion is not a modern invention. Rather, the effort to resist religious power and authority and the attempt to question — on the basis of careful reasoning — whether or not religious teachings are true is a relatively recent invention. It evidently started with the intellectual awakening in ancient Greece that was exemplified by Socrates, and it continued with the Enlightenment of Europe in the 1600s-1700s.

In this context, let's consider Prof. Craig's statement as quoted above, excluding reference to the Bible. We can imagine religious leaders throughout the many thousands of years of human history making a culturally comparable statement in appealing to the people of their community, admonishing the people to put their faith in the religion of their culture in order to honor the respective gods. And we can imagine many people responding accordingly by interpreting relevant experiences as direct communication from the supernatural — experiences interpreted according to the religion of the respective culture.

In *Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Age* (2000), Jeremy McInerney quotes testimony of polytheist believers in the centuries before Christ. Such believers testify to visions and visitations of the gods to which they feel intimately connected. Our word *enthusiasm* is from Greek and refers to a person's spirit being infused by a god, and this was one way the Mediterranean people expressed the intimate connection between divinity and humanity. Complementing this intensely personal approach to religion, a popular theme of the age was the longing for a personal savior god who cares about you as an individual. This is the cultural context in which Christianity was born as a variation of Judaism — a variation that absorbed religious sensibilities and practices from popular polytheist cults of the time.

[Jeremy McInerney, *Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Age*, 2000, lec. 19-21, transcript book p. 104-116, 132-133, 145-147, Teaching Company, Chantilly, VA]

Now let's ask, "Is Prof. Craig merely urging us to continue this longstanding legacy of religiously devout people?" The answer is a resounding, "No!" Prof. Craig is urging us to continue the longstanding legacy of religiously devout people *only if we interpret relevant experiences according to Christian teaching*. And this brings us back to where we started: how do we know if Christian teaching is true, and more generally, how do we know if God even exists?

As a final note on this topic, since Prof. Craig likes syllogisms, I wish to present two syllogisms relevant to the following statement of Prof. Craig, which I quoted above:

If you're sincerely seeking God, God will make his existence evident to you.

Syllogism 1:

If a person sincerely seeks God, God will make his existence evident to them.

A person sincerely seeking God comes to the conclusion that God does not exist.

Therefore, God does not exist.

Syllogism 2:

If a person sincerely seeks God, God will make his existence evident to them.

A person sincerely seeking God comes to the conclusion that God does not exist.

But God exists!

Therefore, the person is not sincere.

Conclusion

Prof. Craig states that the atheist debate opponent must refute all five of Prof. Craig's points and then go on to prove that God does not exist. (27:33) I refuted three of Prof. Craig's points in my article on the debate with Prof. Law, and I have refuted the remaining two points in this article. Furthermore, as I said in my article on the debate with Prof. Law, I believe that I have developed the only rational proof of God's existence or non-existence but that the details of the proof remain to be specified in formal logic.