

I Don't Believe in God I Believe in Science

This seems to be a common world view that many people hold today. It is important that when we look at statements like this we spend a proper amount of time defining terms.

The first term that requires clarification is that of “Believe”. The way this term is used in the first part of the statement seems to indicate that a person does not believe or think that God exists. The second part of the statement would indicate that the person believes in science. It appears that the person doesn’t really believe in science but trusts in science.

So let us rephrase the statement as follows: I don’t believe that God exists and therefore I put my trust in science. Or the statement can read I don’t know if

God exists, but what I can know is made available to me by science. Or the statement can read I can't know if God exists, but what I can know is made available to me by science.

So with the proper understanding of the term believe we have two basic understandings of this statement which can be stated as follows:

1. I don't believe that God exists, what I do know is made available to me by science.
2. I don't know or can't know that God exists, what I do know is made available to me by science.

These two options of understanding the position relate directly to the difference between atheism

and agnosticism. The atheist denies God's existence and the agnostic cannot be sure that God exists.

The next important term to define is that of "science". Science quite simply is knowledge. It is a particular type of knowledge. Aristotle's definition of science is certain knowledge in terms of proper causes and principles. Scientific knowledge is certain knowledge not theoretical knowledge.

In the realm of causal knowledge we start with the axiom that every effect has a cause. This knowledge is obtained by reasoning from causes to effects or from effects to causes. Reasoning quite simply is taking two known truths and deriving a third truth. The classical example of syllogistic reasoning is as follows: All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore Socrates is mortal.

The two primary methods of reasoning are induction and deduction. Deductive reasoning or deduction works from the more general to the more specific. Take for instance the science of geometry as developed by Euclid. Euclid was born approximately 330 B.C and taught mathematics in Alexandria, Egypt. Euclid is often referred to as the "Father of Geometry." He wrote The Elements which is divided into thirteen books which cover plane geometry, arithmetic and number theory, irrational numbers, and solid geometry. Euclid organized the known geometrical ideas, starting with simple definitions, axioms; formed statements called theorems, and set forth methods for logical proofs. He began with accepted mathematical truths, axioms and postulates (which represent the general), and demonstrated logically 467 propositions (the specific) in plane and solid geometry.

Inductive reasoning is the opposite of deductive reasoning. It moves from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories. This is sometimes called a “bottom up” approach. The researcher begins with specific observations and measures, begins to then detect patterns and regularities, formulate some tentative hypotheses to explore, and finally ends up developing some general conclusions or theories. For example all the tigers observed in a particular region have black stripes on orange fur. Therefore all the tiger’s native to this region have black stripes on orange fur. This generalization can be tested further and if an observation would contradict this conclusion, the conclusion would have to be modified.

Also we need to be clear that scientific knowledge is not the only knowledge that we can acquire. Scientific knowledge comes to us by way of reasoning. We also can know by way of direct

experience, if you touch a hot stove you experience heat and possibly pain if there is a burn. This is called experiential knowledge, knowledge acquired by direct experience.

Another type of knowledge that we acquire is called faith knowledge. Faith by definition is believing something based on the word of another. On a natural basis we receive most of our knowledge by way of faith. If someone tells you where they went last night and what they had for dinner, you acquire that particular knowledge based on belief of the word of another (faith). When we study history in school, we are learning historical facts based on faith. The historical facts we are taught are strengthened by the evidence and testimony of others who were present when the event took place, so we have knowledge based on faith with reliable testimony.

Even most of the science that we know is based on faith in the small number of scientists that have done the experiments. We oftentimes believe what is promulgated as science because of some study or experiment done by some expert. So most of what we know is based on faith, not science or direct experience.

Faith in a supernatural sense is believing something based on the word of God. God who is a person communicates (reveals himself) to us and our response to this communication is faith.

It is important to note that the Catholic Church has taught consistently that faith and reason are complimentary. Reason needs faith and faith needs reason. John Paul II in his encyclical letter Faith and Reason states, "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the

contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.” “Reason and faith cannot be separated without diminishing the capacity of men and women to know themselves, the world and God in an appropriate way.” – Pope John Paul II.

The Catholic Church has throughout its history promoted and defended human reason. The Church in the Middle Ages founded the University system in Europe and developed the basis for the empirical sciences and the scientific method.

As part of the defense of reason the Church has stated that there are three fundamental truths that you can come to know using reason alone without

Revelation (Faith). These truths are the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and the freedom of the will.

In other words you can come to know by proper use of your reason that God exists, that you have a soul and it can and does exist without the body and that you are a moral creature and are responsible for your actions.

The fundamental truth that God does exist and we can know this with certainty disproves the position of the atheists and agnostics.

Saint Thomas Aquinas provides us five ways in which we can come to the conclusion that God exists using reason alone. Let us consider the following rational arguments for the existence of God:

CHANGE – The world in which we live is animated by motion. Things are either in motion or can be put into motion. A thing is said to be in motion when it is gaining or acquiring something which it did not have. Therefore, when a person is acquiring knowledge, he is moving; when he is advancing in age, he is moving. A thing cannot be in motion and at the same time at rest. Rest is the absence of motion. If an object is at rest where does it acquire motion? It certainly cannot give this motion to itself, for it does not possess it. It can receive motion only from some other object, which already has it. Take a look at the acorn; it has the potentiality to grow into an oak tree. In order for the acorn to be an oak tree it has to be acted on by the sun, soil and rain. The sun, soil and rain are also in motion and being moved by other phenomena. So the entire material universe is in motion. Change in any material reality requires an outside force that

initiates the change. Therefore there must be an unchanging source from outside the material universe that can actuate the change that exists within the material universe. We call this source – God.

CAUSALITY – If we look at the computer on our desk or the automobile in our driveway, we are certain that these things were made by someone, they did not make themselves. Something or someone must have caused the computer or car to come into being. The effect (car or computer) must have a cause. If a person caused the car and computer to come into existence, then who caused that particular person to come into existence? That person's parents? Who caused that person's parents to be born? For something to exist it must be given its existence (caused). If existence is a gift that comes from cause to effect then there must be a cause that is not an effect, an uncaused cause (the

originator and possessor of the gift of existence). The series of causes and effects must have a beginning, a first cause - God.

CONTINGENCY – There are things in this world, including us as human beings, which may exist now but at one time did not exist. These things are contingent on other things for their existence. Man is contingent on air, food, water, shelter, clothing etc. for his earthly existence. A being that is contingent requires some being that is not contingent (an absolute being). We call a being that is not dependent on any other being in order to sustain its existence – God.

PERFECTION – In the world in which we live we can see things that are good, true, beautiful, living and all of which possess various degrees of perfection. Non-living things (rocks, water, and air) possess no

life and are at the service of living things. Plants and trees are living things, but possess life in an extremely limited degree. Animals possess life in a higher degree than plants: humans possess life in a higher degree than animals but still lack perfection. If there are things in existence possessing limited perfections, then there must exist a being who possesses perfection in an inexhaustible and infinite degree – God.

INTELLIGENCE – There are many things in this world, which were made for a definite reason. We can observe things that lack intelligence, acting always or nearly always, in the same way so as to achieve a certain end. For example, water is the only liquid on this earth that freezes from the top down. All other liquids freeze from the bottom up. This phenomenon preserves the fish life in the world. If water froze from the bottom up, our streams and lakes in colder climates would be

frozen solid in winter, and all life in such a climate would perish also. Water freezing from the top down is a crucial fact in preserving all of the higher forms of life outside the tropics. So, we see something that lacks intelligence (water) acting for an intelligent end. Therefore, there must be a supreme intelligence that directs things in nature to their end, this supreme intelligence is God.