



#4 – Isn't religion just the worship of what you don't understand? (Often called the God of the Gaps)

An Introductory Note

This question is an excellent introduction to the questions on evolution, the Big Bang and dinosaurs on the Ark. Because we spend a little time thinking about what “science” is and is capable of doing, you should likely do this topic before tackling the evolution question.



Key Definitions:

The God of the Gaps

The belief that faith and worship are relegated to the areas where we lack knowledge. So primitive tribes worshipped the sun or trees or even airplanes, and as we advance in knowledge, the gaps in our knowledge grow smaller, therefore the God we worship grows smaller and less relevant as science explains more.



(This is not what I mean by the God of the Gaps)

Teleological Argument

The argument that science has discovered and documented numerous fundamental values and constants about the basic properties of our universe that are extremely fine-tuned to a very narrow window that specifically allows life to exist on our planet in our universe in a way that begs us to realize this was designed by an intelligent being.

The Failures of the God of the Gaps Argument

- The God of the Gaps fallacy is to believe that we worship without using our brains or that we worship in ignorance, or only worship the areas that we don't understand.
- If you found a pocket watch on the beach, it would not be ignorant to note the intricate inner-workings of the watch and conclude that this was not the product of time, chance and accident, but a creation by an intelligent designer.



The more you know about watch-making, the more you are amazed by the watch you found. Your conclusion that this is designed is only enhanced and reinforced as you learn more about its mechanism.

- **Arguing for a God of the Gaps makes your definition of God quite small:**

“God is the parts that we don't understand.”

When answering God of the Gaps, what level will you reach?

Padawan

- Can give an example where God of the Gaps thinking is reasonable.
- Can explain why belief in Jesus is very very different than belief in Santa Claus.

Jedi

- Can explain – using a watch on the beach – how studying watchmaking only increases your belief that this watch was designed.
- Can explain an area of scientific research where increases in knowledge give us significantly more reasons to believe in God, not less. Examples:

Complete failure to show how life can come from matter through random chance after 100+ years of trying.

The **Teleological Argument** that our universe and planet are ridiculously fine-tuned for life.

Jedi Master

- Can recall from memory most or all of the list of 5 things inaccessible to science.

- Henry Ford invented the automobile. Engineers and physicists tearing apart a car, will not find Henry Ford in the study of the mechanisms and parts of a modern engine, but his fingerprints are all over the design if you can open your eyes to see them.

It would be ignorant and foolish to claim that your understanding of modern automobile engine design has proven that there is no Henry Ford because you can't find him in the mechanism.



- Two scientists, Stanley Miller and Harold Urey, attempted to simulate the believed conditions of early earth and were able to create amino acids in a test tube using their apparatus in 1952. This experiment is widely heralded as the first major confirmation of progress towards life being created in a test tube.

There are more than a few issues with this claim. They took some the building blocks of life (water, ammonia, methane and hydrogen), added some electrical sparks, and made a mix of other, slightly more complicated building blocks of life (at least five amino acids). Other amino acids most definitely could not be made with the same method, and ongoing research has utterly failed to create all the necessary building blocks of life and bring them together in a plausible mechanism to make a living cell. Some need heat, some need cold, some need electricity, some need salinity, some need no salinity...

Even if they did successfully make a “living cell” in a test tube, all they would be proving is that an intelligent being can design a mechanism to create life. **They would be proving Intelligent Design NOT evolution, chance and accident!!!**

- If God of the Gaps were true, the more we understand about life, the easier it would be to believe that it is easy to create living things, and that life is not a miracle or mystery, but can be generated in a plausible ancient sea as created in a lab. But we do not find God in the gaps. The gap to creating life (abiogenesis) is just one more canyon where the evidence and increasing knowledge begs us to recognize an intelligent creator, and **the more we know, the more we have reasonable grounds for the Christian faith.**

- **The God of the Gaps is a Straw-Man Argument.** It props up a fake opponent – a fake definition of God – then attacks that fake definition by calling it silly and small and like Santa Claus – then claims a victory.



- Christians do not worship the part we can't know and understand. We worship the One that we can know, and we do so based on the evidence that He is real and quite present and available to those who are open to finding Him.

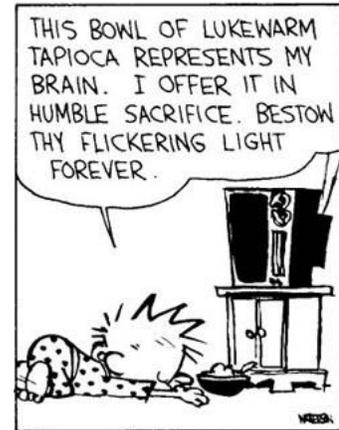
Acts 17:24-28 NKJV

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things... ²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being...”

*We must seek Him, though He is not far from each of us.
He is not the god of the Gaps, but the God of the whole show!
The more we know Him and the more we learn about
His creation, the more we have reason to worship.*

Valid Examples of God of the Gaps Reasoning

- Rain and harvests were attributed to the shifting emotions of deities such as the sun god or rain god, but few make offerings to these climatological deities today with our increased understanding of the water cycle and climatology.
- Seizures were often associated with demonic possession, but we have come to understand that most seizures are caused by biochemical imbalances in the brain. (Note my careful use of the word “most”.)
- **So here is a controversial one that is very common in Pentecostal church circles, but has its basis in well-understand bio-chemistry. This one may very well hit too close to home for you, but listen to what the Christian website GotQuestions.org says about sleep paralysis and demons:**



The common version of this story that many claim to have experienced, is that they woke up to a demon or dark shadow looming over their bed, and they were paralyzed – unable to move or even struggling to breath. Then they prayed or even just struggled to whisper the name of Jesus, and the dark shadow and paralysis immediately left!

As someone who has studied psychology and physiology as part of my undergraduate and graduate work in the physical sciences, I learned about the biochemical basis of sleep paralysis in the early 1990's. Everything in the following article matches up with what I learned in school about the human body and brain.

GotQuestions.org¹ – Is sleep paralysis the result of spiritual attack?

Sleep paralysis can be a very scary thing. In it, you know you're asleep, you try to wake up, but you can't. It's often accompanied by an irrational feeling of utter terror, and sometimes images of figures in black cloaks. Many cultures have developed supernatural explanations for sleep paralysis.

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/sleep-paralysis.html>

In China, it's called *mèng yǎn*, "ghost pressing on body." In some Muslim countries, it's associated with an evil *djinn*. In Africa, it's called "the witch riding your back."

However, there is an entirely physiological explanation for the phenomenon known as sleep paralysis. As we fall asleep, our minds may enter a hypnagogic state. It's what happens when the sleeper's still-aware mind is faced with dream images. As some people wake up, they experience a hypnopompic state, which is the dreaming mind faced with stimuli from the real world. In both cases, the dreams can seem very real, taking on a vivid, hallucinatory feeling. Often these images are of black smudges, which the confused mind interprets as human figures, sometimes called "shadow people." The hallucinations can also take the form of sounds like a loud bang or a child's cry. These episodes frequently begin with a falling feeling followed by a "hypnic jerk" where the body's muscles violently contract.

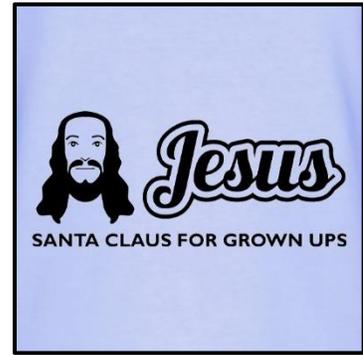
One of the scarier experiences with sleep paralysis is the inclusion of lucid dreaming and false awakening. The sleeper recognizes he's asleep and tries to wake up. He opens his eyes in relief, but soon realizes he's still asleep. This can go on for some time, sometimes resulting in an actual awareness of his real surroundings—the pressure of the covers, the light of the room beyond his eyelids—but still the inability to fully waken. That awareness can slip away again, returning the sleeper to the hallucinations.

Muscle paralysis in sleep is a necessary thing. People who act out their dreams on a regular basis are prone to accidental injury—even jumping out of windows. Knowing that you're asleep and paralyzed, however, can be frightening. You tell yourself to open your eyes, just to get caught in another false awakening. One theory is that sleep paralysis affects the larger parts of the body more completely. You can try to wake up by wiggling your toes or fingers. It's also possible to pray during this time. This will often give comfort that lets you fall back into unconsciousness. You may be able to avoid sleep paralysis by getting sufficient rest and avoiding drugs and alcohol.

In probably the vast majority of cases, sleep paralysis is just a quirk in a person's REM cycle, not a spiritual attack. At the same time, there is no denying that demons can and do attack us. It seems plausible, then, that demons can and do attack us while we sleep. In the Gospels, several instances of demonic attack involved clear physical symptoms. So, it is possible that a demonic attack could result in symptoms resembling sleep paralysis. Whatever the case, we have a God who watches over us, whether we are awake or asleep (1 John 4:4).

John Lennox on Belief in Santa Claus

- My example for this is 5m43s long and titled: “The God of the Bible is NOT like Santa or mythological gods”
- Lennox mentions this argument in several of his talks on YouTube, and the argument comes in up multiple forms. Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and others have mentioned it in debates as a cute way of mocking Christian belief as silly or ridiculous. The argument goes something like:
 - How is belief in God any different than belief in Santa Claus? Maybe when you were a child you believed, but isn't it time to grow up?
 - How is belief in the Christian God any different than belief in Thor or Zeus or Diana worship or any of the many other gods worshipped around the world?
- The answer is simple, there is no significant body of intelligent and rational people who have come to believe in any of these other deities as adults, yet there are millions of respectable and accomplished scientists and professionals who have come to believe, trust and claim faith in Jesus Christ as God incarnate in flesh, dying and resurrecting from the grave.



- To compare this to the myth of Santa Claus, a tale told to children and believed by no respected body of adults, is an insult to the great body of work of numerous amazing Christian intellectuals.



- Lennox often answers by asking large audiences:
“How many of you came to believe in Santa as an adult?”
“How many of you came to believe in God as an adult?”

“With great respect, sir, please do not insult our intelligence.”

William Craig's Five Things Inaccessible to Science

- This comes from a debate between Christian apologist Dr. William Lane Craig and Atheist scientist Dr. Peter Atkins. It is usually easily findable on YouTube.
- Craig first points out that where a belief comes from does not invalidate or validate whether the belief is true. This is called “the genetic fallacy”. For instance, Nazis believed in gravity, and the Nazis were evil and wrong, but their belief in gravity doesn’t become evil or wrong because they believed in it. And if they discovered something was scientifically true, it would not be false because it came from Nazis.

But then we get to the meat of the question...



- Atkins makes the claim that the following two points combined make an argument against the existence of God or against believing in God (starting at 40s into the 2m58s clip I found on YouTube):
 - **Science is omnipotent** ← Dr. Atkins words
Science is or will be able to explain everything!
 - You don’t need a god to explain the world we have ← also his words
Even if people desperately want to believe in a god.
- Atkins then asks Craig,
“Do you deny that science cannot account for everything?”
- William Lane Craig responds (@ 1m15s),
“I think there are a good number of things that cannot be scientifically proven but that we are all rational to accept. Let me list five:

- 1) **Logical and mathematical truths cannot be proven by science.**
Science pre-supposes logic and math...
- 2) **Metaphysical truths cannot be proven by science.**
For instance, there are other minds other than my own.
Or that the external world is real. Or that the past was not created five minutes ago with an appearance of age.
[These] are rational beliefs that cannot be scientifically proven.
- 3) **Ethical beliefs about statements of value are not accessible by the scientific method.** You cannot show by science whether the Nazi scientists in the [concentration] camps did anything evil as opposed to the scientists in Western democracies.
- 4) **Aesthetic judgements cannot be accessed by the scientific method, because the beautiful, like the good, cannot be scientifically proven.**
- 5) **Science itself cannot be justified by the scientific method. Science is permeated with unprovable assumptions.** For instance, in the Special Theory of Relativity – the whole theory hinges on the assumption that the speed of light is constant in a one-way direction between any two points A and B, but that strictly cannot be proven. We simply have to assume that to hold to the theory.

None of these beliefs can be scientifically proven, yet they are accepted to be rational and reasonable beliefs to hold.”

Most rational people would agree that this list pretty much destroys the idea that “Science is Omnipotent”.

If you don’t agree, just look at the expression on Peter Atkin’s face after William Craig finishes his list. If this is not enough, however, let’s look at one of many great examples of belief in God based on scientific discovery...

The Fine Tuning of the Universe – The Teleological Argument

- You don't have to memorize the fancy name, but you do have to figure out how to find this video if you want to show it to someone else. Bookmark it in your phone somehow or ask a nerd to help you save the link to this video on YouTube. I will also post a link to this when I update the Navy Seal Resources page on my website at 99BibleVerses.com.
- My favorite video is the one created by ReasonableFaith.org and published on YouTube by Hypernidao Productions (6m26s) and titled:

“The Fine Tuning of the Universe: The Teleological Argument”



- I like that most of the quotes in the video are by atheists and agnostics who are honestly declaring the plain truth that the numbers and data beg us to consider that someone designed this place.

“The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life.”

– Dr. Stephen Hawking (Atheist Physicist)

“There is for me powerful evidence that there is something going on behind it all... it seems as though somebody has fine-tuned nature's numbers to make the universe. The impression of design is overwhelming.”

– Dr. Paul Davies (Agnostic Physicist)

“A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question.”

– Dr. Fred Hoyle (Atheist Physicist)